

Inspection of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service A report by HM Inspectors

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Provider type	Employer
Lead HMI	Peter B Connelly
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. The team met with staff, apprentices 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 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

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) covers all of Scotland and employs 2740 staff in total, of which 25 are apprentices at Band B (entry level). All apprentices have the same job description and receive the same salary as all other civil service Band B Fiscal Officers. The COPFS MA programme focusses on the Criminal Justice sector and on developing the COPFS future workforce. The main elements of delivery include the Business and Administration SVQ (level 6) to develop the apprentices for an administration role within COPFS and a career within the Civil Service.

COPFS is currently in a period of transformation and is embedding a new organisational structure, changed governance structures, new roles and teams covering specialist areas and a developing Talent Management Strategy to support the employee life cycle.

Delivery is partnership-based with operational managers, ensuring learning is relevant and aligned to the Business Administration SVQ Level 6. After six months, apprentices commence the Certificate in Prosecution Practice 1 (CIPP 1) with a college sub-contractor provider via distance learning.

Training staff are based at the Scottish Prosecution College (SPC) in Glasgow. The SPC has classrooms and a mock courtroom in which staff can simulate the work of the criminal courts. Much of the programme is undertaken via online meetings and also with in-person progress and review meetings at their local offices.

3. Outcome of inspection

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and management	Excellent
Delivery of Training	Very Good
Progress and Outcomes	Excellent

4. Summary of inspection findings

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

Element 1: Leadership and Management

QI 9.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The leadership team and programme staff at COPFS deliver the strategic vision effectively, which helps to prepares all employees including apprentices, with the appropriate skills and competencies to conduct an effective criminal prosecution service.
- The leadership team convey a strong mission to guide the team, shaping the delivery of the programme and wider learning across COPFS. Their focus is on building skilled, resilient employees who feel supported to deliver an excellent service.
- Leaders design the programme to be outcome-focused, enabling apprentices to perform effectively in their role, whilst developing future workforce capacity for the service.

- Apprenticeship recruitment directly supports long-term workforce plans. Good liaison with the Crown Office Resourcing and Workforce Planning team ensures that workforce planning delivers growth in the number of MA candidates in relevant departments, which corresponds well to emerging social justice issues in the prosecution service.
- Managers promote the programme well across the organisation. The Scottish Modern Apprenticeship week provides a useful focus for this alongside good use of the intranet to raise the profile of the programme. The learning and development team have developed a portfolio of training for staff across the organisation as part of their learning and development strategy.
- MAs are regarded as civil servants at the same grade undertaking similar duties. This arrangement and working environment supports candidates to gather good levels of relevant evidence for assessment.
- Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to apprentice support and wellbeing. This commences at an early stage of selection and induction and continues effectively throughout the apprentices' programme.
- Line managers communicate effectively with assessors and apprentices. This supports a shared understanding of most appropriate approaches to take with candidates and ensures programme delivery is aligned closely to business requirements.
- The provider demonstrates strong sectoral leadership, contributing to national groups such as the SDS Employer Involvement Community of Practice. This encourages other providers in the sharing of effective practice in employer support, mentoring and sustaining apprentice development beyond completion of the programme.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation and change

Areas of positive progress

- Senior leaders adapt plans well to better align the organisation's strategic, business and organisational requirements. COPFS are currently undergoing a period of transformation with the new organisational structure becoming embedded. Throughout this period of change, leaders have ensured that MA programmes are flexible, business and service focused and align closely with workforce development requirements.
- Managers prioritise continuous improvement of the service and focus on supporting the delivery of high-quality casework. This is linked well to the improvements staff implement in the MA programme, working with line managers to ensure work patterns meet business expectations and quality of service delivery alongside alignment with the requirements of the

programme.

- The learning and development team ensures that apprentices are introduced to the concept of meta skills at the start of the programme. Apprentices reflect well on how well they have developed these skills as part of their progress reviews and on completion of the MA programme.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- There is a strong team approach to delivering improvements to the programme. Regular discussions with senior staff and delivery staff, alongside the collection of feedback from apprentices and managers, helps to identify and resolve issues.
- Assessors work well with apprentices and line managers to select units within the programme that best meets the needs of both the apprentice and the service. This is supporting apprentices effectively and resulting in almost all apprentices being able to accelerate completion of the programme.
- Apprentices and line managers express high levels of satisfaction with the apprenticeship programme. Line managers are very satisfied with the performance of candidates and state apprentices develop relevant skills more readily and quickly than their colleagues.
- All staff plan their activities effectively. They plan interactions with apprentices carefully to ensure both apprentices and line managers have sufficient availability to meet and discuss their progress. This allows busy work schedules to continue without disruption.
- COPFS provide a platform for all staff to contribute to the review and development of the programme through a schedule of development days. Staff work effectively as a team and feel that they fully contribute to this process. They describe the impact of changes that have been implemented as a result of development meetings, for example, changes to apprentices' induction and the introduction of a manager's induction programme.
- All assessors comply with awarding body quality assurance standards and verification requirements. This ensures assessment decisions are fair and reinforces employer and learner confidence in the quality of training provision.

Areas for development

- None identified.

Element 2 Delivery of training

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- There is a strong focus on apprentices' on-the-job training experiences and developing candidates' work skills alongside their progress on the MA programme. Apprentices use good examples from their day-to-day roles as evidence of their progression in skills and competencies.
- Assessors use a range of approaches to gather evidence, all of which are recorded digitally and documented, including observations, story boards and reflective accounts. This ensures the evidence collected is clear and comprehensive and helps maintain quality and consistency in assessment decisions.
- Apprentices have access to a range of helpful online and digital platforms to support them with learning resources to enable them to study at a pace or place that suits their needs.
- All staff plan activities well and ensure that apprentices receive timeous and effective progress visits and support for specific needs.
- All delivery sessions are planned well and supported by appropriate industry standard resources. For example, the mock court room in the SPC allows for role play exercises which help deepen apprentices understanding and develops relevant knowledge and technical skills.
- All apprentices are engaged and motivated by the programme. They appreciate the opportunities to condense weekly allocated course time into one day each month when they can focus exclusively on their programme.
- Managers and staff embed meta skills development in training activities which are tracked effectively by assessors during the programme.
- All apprentices are supported well during both on and off-the-job training and know who to contact should any concerns arise.
- All assessors use a holistic approach to evidence gathering, linking workplace activities to multiple units where appropriate. This approach helps to reduce duplication and effectively demonstrates to apprentices how their skills transfer across different units.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- All staff are experienced and deliver learning well. There are positive relationships between all apprentices and their assessors, and they appreciate the support and expertise of the training staff.
- Line managers provide high quality training in the workplace. They apply their professional knowledge and skills to support apprentices to become fully competent and independent in their work role. Apprentices are able to complete the SVQ in a seamless way by using naturally occurring evidence from their workplace.
- There are good examples of apprentices sharing their work, such as storyboards, with the wider teams they work within. This is further developing apprentices' confidence and sharing an improved understanding of the MA programme.
- All apprentices use the e-portfolio system well to monitor and track progression and upload storyboards from their day-to-day work as a strong evidence base for their progression reviews.
- All assessors encourage apprentices to deepen their understanding and knowledge of their work roles and set milestones and targets for apprentices to complete tasks in preparation for their next progress review.
- All assessors coordinate candidate experiences very well with line managers to ensure apprentices receive appropriate and relevant practice in day-to-day tasks to develop skills and competencies.
- Managers and other peers are very supportive of apprentices and ensure that they are trained well in their day-to-day roles. This helps apprentices to create relevant evidence for uploading and demonstrating their progress.
- All apprentices speak highly of their programme experiences and appreciate the approaches which training staff take to support their motivation and engagement, particularly when pressing business needs can create tight time constraints.
- Staff meet formally with apprentices and their managers to complete progress reviews.
- Communication between assessors and line managers is highly effective and there are also many, less formal, but equally effective interactions, ensuring delivery staff are accessible to their apprentices.
- Apprentices develop independence and confidence and are able to demonstrate this well through being self-directed to complete their SVQ.

Areas for development

- Apprentices and line managers do not have sufficient opportunities to meet in-person with their peers, limiting opportunities for sharing best practice and collaboration.

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Assessors reflect effectively on the programme through regular meetings and discussions with apprentices and line managers. This helps to identify issues and improvement actions.
- All line managers receive an extensive and comprehensive induction and benefit from working closely with assessors to ensure a consistent approach to assessment practice.
- All apprentices receive a well-conceived and organised induction which supports their progress effectively during their programme.
- Line managers, assessors and apprentices engage productively in the progress review meetings, and these are helpful to highlight potential improvements and target areas where apprentices need further development.
- Questionnaires and pulse surveys are used effectively by staff to collect the views of apprentices, and these are used well in programme review.
- Apprentices are given time to settle into their role prior to being enrolled in the CIPP 1. This ensures they are better equipped to deal with the challenges of completing the enhanced component of their programme online.

Areas for development

- Staff at the SPC do not have sufficient input into the design and delivery of the CIPP 1 enhanced qualification. They do not receive regular evaluative reports on the progress of apprentices or the quality of the programme. The programme content has not been updated for a number of years.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes

QI 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- The overall rate of apprentice achievement rate is high and is consistently above the national average and the SDS target achievement rate.

- The overall rate of apprentice achievement for 16- to 19-year-olds in A/Y 2023-24 was 100%. This is well above SDS target achievement rate of 70% and 28.8% above the national achievement rate of 71.2% for this age group.
- The overall rate of apprentice rate for the 20 year-old plus group in A/Y 2023-24 and A/Y 2024-25, are 80% and 83.3% respectively. These are above the SDS target achievement rate of 75% and above the national achievement rates for the same periods being at 79.1% and 82.2%.
- Recruitment of apprentices with a declared disability has increased in the last year and is now above the national average. Recruitment of female apprentices has been significantly above the national average rate for the last three years.
- Almost all apprentices complete the programme early and there are examples of apprentices gaining promotion whilst still undertaking their apprenticeship programme.
- There are very high levels of apprentice retention during the programme.

Areas for development

- There are a limited number of apprentices in the 16-19 MA age group. Absence due to ill health has contributed to an overall rate of apprenticeship achievement in 2024-25 of 66.7%, which is 9.2% below the national achievement rate of 75.9%.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all candidates make progress in the development of appropriate meta skills. They speak confidently about these skills and can demonstrate how they develop them in their working contexts.
- All line managers are impressed with their apprentices' development, reporting significant improvement in their work-related performance both during and after completion of the programme.
- All apprentices consistently report high levels of satisfaction with the structure and delivery of the programme, and with the quality and accessibility of assessor support. They confirm that participation in the qualification is enhancing their competence and is building their confidence in the workplace. A few apprentices progress onto the higher level of CIPP.
- All apprentices and managers value the opportunity that undertaking the apprenticeship provides. They state that the achievement of personal goals increases apprentices' confidence in applying for further roles in the organisation.

Areas for development

- None identified.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are identified:

- Managers should jointly evaluate the quality of the online programme with staff from the CIPP 1 course to identify and implement quality improvements where necessary.
- Line managers and apprentices should have more opportunities to meet in person with their peers to collaborate and share ideas and best practice examples.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

- Liaising with apprentices and their line managers, training staff have developed a bespoke induction programme for line managers to support their understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. This helps them to support apprentices to build appropriate skills and competencies.

7. What happens next?

HM Inspectors are confident that COPFS has the capacity to continue to improve and will make no further visits as a result of this inspection.

Peter B Connelly
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

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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.