

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by Craft Skills Scotland

A report by HM Inspectors

5 May 2026

CEO/Principal	Gordon King
External review date	23 February 2026
Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Lead HMI	Jacqueline McLellan
Apprentice numbers	178

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

Craft Skills Scotland (CSS) is a training provider delivering MAs in Food and Drink Operations at SCQF Levels 5 and 6, with a particular focus on butchery. The organisation currently supports 178 apprentices across 120 employer partners within the meat and food production industry. Delivery is aligned to employer requirements and sector standards.

CSS works with employers across Scotland to deliver apprenticeships, workforce development, and bespoke training aligned to identified regional skills needs. MAs are delivered primarily on-site within the apprentice's workplace, ensuring that assessment and learning reflect day-to-day job roles and responsibilities.

3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Management	Very Good
Delivery of Training	Very Good
Progress and Outcomes	Good

4. Summary of review findings

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

Element 1: Leadership and Management - Very Good

Q19.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The leadership team works productively with a wide range of national bodies to influence and inform national policy and ensure MA provision is aligned to industry needs.
- The leadership team makes effective use of regional meetings to provide regular updates and ensure employers and partners are kept informed of organisational priorities and programme adjustments. Employers value the partnership approach taken by the leadership team in keeping them up-to-date with developments.
- Leaders demonstrate a strong understanding of the employment market and workforce demographic trends within the butchery sector. They promote careers in butchery effectively and make good use of a range of publications, videos, online resources and events to raise awareness of the sector and career pathways. The provider is regarded well by partners involved in the meat industry who value the support they receive.
- CSS contributes productively to Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) events to raise awareness of vocational pathways and promote the Scottish food and drink industry as a viable career choice for school-age young people.
- Managers work well in partnership with national bodies, schools and colleges to promote the industry and provide recruitment opportunities. They make good use of social media to target underrepresented groups, including an initiative to attract young women into butchery.

Areas for development

- None

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation and change

Areas of positive progress

- All assessors make effective use of technology through videos, voice recordings and photographs to collate and evidence assessments. This has improved the quality of assessment and is enabling apprentices to engage in more efficient and relevant assessment practice.
- Assessors work flexibly with employers to make appropriate adjustments to individual programmes. For example, if an apprentice's job role changes, assessors adjust qualification units undertaken to take account of revised duties. This ensures the programme remains relevant and helps apprentices to progress without unnecessary delay.
- The provider has developed an innovative approach to the introduction of meta skills within programmes. However, this is at a very early stage and is not yet impacting on the experience of apprentices.

Areas for development

- None

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- CSS managers make effective use of regular team meetings to support staff to participate in quality assurance and quality enhancement arrangements. Staff engage constructively in team-based self-evaluation arrangements and contribute well to identify actions for improvement and enhancement.
- Standardisation and self-evaluation activities result in clear actions to share and embed good practice across the team. 'How to' folders are used well by staff to share and adopt standardised practice.
- All assessors comply well with awarding body quality assurance standards and verification requirements. Assessors are confident in the validation of learner assessments, that assessment decisions are fair, and that employers and learners are confident about the quality of training provision.
- All employers report that managers and assessors are receptive to suggestions for improvement and provide them with good opportunities to convey their views.



Employer feedback is formally recorded during workplace visits, and a series of questionnaires are used well by managers to identify and collate information on employer satisfaction levels.

- The introduction of an evaluation form which is directly accessible by each the apprentice has increased apprentice response rates and is being used well by staff to support continuous improvement.

Areas for development

- A few apprentices experience delays in progressing at an appropriate pace due to staffing issues such as assessor absence, employer staff shortages and lack of workplace mentor availability.

Element 2 Delivery of training - Very Good

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all assessors use a holistic approach to evidence gathering, linking workplace activities to multiple units where appropriate. This reduces duplication and effectively demonstrates to apprentices how their skills transfer across different subjects.
- Assessors work well with employers and apprentices to identify training needs. They select units aligned to business objectives to ensure training is practical and relevant to workplace priorities.
- Almost all employers confirm the apprenticeship programme is delivered flexibly which enables apprentices to learn and progress at a pace appropriate to their work and personal circumstances.
- All apprentices report that assessors are approachable, encourage them to take ownership of their learning, and support them well throughout their programme. They value the regular feedback and guidance they receive to stay focused and chart progress towards achieving their individual learning goals.
- Almost all apprentices make appropriate progress and develop relevant skills during their training. All apprentices demonstrate a clear understanding of their progress and next steps. They draw constructively upon reviews and feedback from staff to identify areas for development and improvement.
- All assessors have undertaken a range of professional learning and effectively support apprentices with additional support needs. They work well with partners to implement arrangements to support apprentices with additional needs such as dyslexia, autism, and whose first language is not English. Where required, they



collaborate with external agencies to access additional specialist support.

- Almost all apprentices have access to high-quality, industry-relevant resources and facilities that enable them to practice and align skills to current industry standards and practices. This helps them gain confidence in applying their skills in the workplace.
- All employers report that the apprenticeship programme meets their business needs, prepares apprentices well for employment, and enables them to develop and retain skilled staff.

Areas for development

- Additional resources available to apprentices to broaden and deepen their knowledge are not promoted sufficiently well.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- Managers effectively monitor and promote assessors' participation in professional learning. They review professional learning records and assessors' engagement in activities including shadowing, industry placements, training courses, and professional events. This ensures assessors remain current in practice and strengthens their credibility with employers and apprentices.
- All assessors apply a coaching approach well to support apprentices to complete the theory components of their apprenticeship. They provide apprentices with a list of activities to develop their study and practical skills between visits.
- All assessors collaborate effectively with workplace mentors to ensure apprentices receive appropriate training and experience to develop skills that prepare them for assessment.
- All assessors are skilled in adjusting assessment approaches to meet individual needs. These include conducting oral assessments and arranging scribing where required.
- Almost all apprentices can participate in wider developmental activities, including visits to tanneries, farms, and other industry settings. These experiences help broaden sector awareness and provide apprentices with a wider understanding of the industry.
- All apprentices are encouraged to complete their programme within an appropriate timescale. Apprentices who want to progress further in their career receive good support and advice from staff on future learning opportunities and employability skills.

Areas for development

- There are no standardised arrangements for the training of workplace mentors to carry out their role. As a result, the level and quality of support provided to apprentices in across workplace locations is variable.

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Assessors deliver an individual and tailored induction to each apprentice at the start of every programme. Confidential discussions help to identify any additional support needs they may have. This ensures each apprentice understands what is required of them and that they feel well prepared to begin their learning.
- The provider has good arrangements in place to enable apprentices who lose their job due to redundancy or other circumstances to access alternative employment and continue their training.
- All employers report high levels of satisfaction with the quality, clarity and consistency of feedback provided by assessors. They confirm that feedback is constructive and helps to create a positive learning environment that supports clear progress tracking and ongoing improvement.
- Managers maintain contact with employers and apprentices who have completed their programme and draw on this to offer additional training to those who wish to develop further in their career. Records indicate that post-apprenticeship employees are either retained by employers or progress in their career.
- Managers and assessors use data and stakeholder feedback effectively to review programme performance to help inform improvements. Regular team meetings support structured and informal reflection on strengths and areas for development. Actions, including a stronger focus on meta skills, have been implemented as a result.
- Managers analyse the reasons for early leavers and follow up with each case. This provides helpful insight to inform targeted actions to reduce withdrawals and improve retention.

Areas for development

- Actions taken in response to key themes arising from feedback from apprentices and employers are not consistently or effectively communicated back to them. As a result, apprentices and employers have limited understanding of how their feedback informs improvement.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes – Good

QI 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- There is sustained progress in widening access and promoting inclusivity.
- Recruitment of care-experienced apprentices has increased steadily, and ethnic minority representation remains above the national average.
- Almost all apprentices are highly satisfied with the structure of their programme and quality of support they receive from assessors. They confirm that the programme builds their skills and confidence for undertaking tasks and duties in the workplace.
- Almost all apprentices and employers value the opportunities the apprenticeship provides to support the achievement of personal goals and enable access to a range of progression pathways.
- Assessors and managers have contextualised core skills numeracy units to reflect industry practice. This is helping apprentices to apply numeracy skills more confidently and accurately in their workplace.

Areas for development

- Approaches to developing meta skills have not yet been fully implemented. As a result, apprentices do not have sufficient understanding of their application in the workplace.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- The overall apprenticeship achievement rate for 16- to 19-year-olds for Craft Skills Scotland was 78.9% and 82.1% in 2024 and 2025 respectively. These are above both the Skills Development Scotland's 70% target and national achievement rates for this age group of 71.2% in 2024 and 75.9% in 2025.
- All apprentices who successfully complete their programme receive valuable information and advice from assessors on progression pathways and career opportunities. This helps apprentices to plan their next steps and longer-term career aspirations within the sector.
- Staff encourage apprentices to participate in competitions, events and initiatives, to showcase their skills and benchmark their performance against industry standards. These activities help build confidence and widen knowledge of industry networks within the Scottish food and drink sector.

- The provider has good arrangements in place to celebrate achievements of apprentices who successfully attain their award. This includes hosting certificate presentations at industry events and sector fairs, alongside promotion on social media platforms. These arrangements are used well to reinforce individual achievements, promote apprenticeship programmes, and engender a community of practice across the sector.

Areas for development

- The overall apprenticeship achievement rate for 20-years-old plus for Craft Skills Scotland was 73.7% and 76.8% in 2024 and 2025 respectively. In 2025 this was above Skills Development Scotland's 75% target but below national achievement rates for this age group were 79.1% in 2024 and 82.2% in 2025.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are identified:

- The provider should improve apprenticeship achievement rates for apprentices aged over 20.

The provider should ensure that plans to incorporate meta skills within programmes are implemented fully and promoted effectively to all stakeholders.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

The provider make effective use of its bespoke digital system for candidate assessment in the workplace. This is enabling efficient progress tracking, timely feedback and accurate recording of evidence.

7. What happens next?

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

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.

Appendix2 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.