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External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by Experiential Play

A report by HM Inspectors

15 September 2026

CEO/Principal	Laura Gray
External review date	11 May 2026
Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Lead HMI	Karen Stevenson
Apprentice numbers	77

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

Experiential Play Ltd offers a practical route into a career in early years through delivery of MAs in Social Services Children and Young People. Apprentices can access the qualifications through either support from Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) funding or from an employer seeking to upskill their workforce.

The organisation is based within Kirktonholme Nursery in Govan where it has its own learning centre and office. They currently employ seven assessors.

At the time of the inspection, Experiential Play had 207 candidates, 77 within the SDS contract.

They work with over 200 employers.

Apprentices are employed over 29 nurseries across Glasgow, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling, West Dumbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire.

3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Management	Good
Delivery of Training	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 - Good

QI 9.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The leadership team foster a positive culture that promotes the provider's key values of inclusivity, making a difference, innovation, effectiveness and honesty. These are reflected well in the day-to-day delivery of the apprenticeship programme. As a result, apprentices benefit from a supportive learning environment.
- All staff demonstrate and promote a clear commitment to meeting the needs of apprentices and employers. Staff have a strong focus on developing competent practitioners, maintaining positive relationships with employers, and ensuring apprentices are well supported throughout their programme. These arrangements meet the needs of almost all apprentices.
- Leaders respond effectively to national policy drivers and sector priorities for childcare in Scotland. Recent guidance on areas including outdoor play, wellbeing, and best childcare practice is incorporated well in programme design and delivery. This supports apprentices well to understand current work-place practice and national expectations within the industry.

Areas for development

- The strategic plan is at an early stage of development and is not yet ready for sharing with

staff and key stakeholders. As a result, stakeholders are not sufficiently aware of the provider's strategic aims and objectives.

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation and change

Areas of positive progress

- Leaders promote innovation in learning and teaching regularly and effectively. Assessors use digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) well to support learner engagement, accessibility, and independent study. Examples include podcasts and digital tools that help apprentices to engage in more challenging learning.
- Managers make effective use of guest speakers and input from sector specialists to broaden apprentices' awareness and understanding of current childcare practice, mental health, and additional support needs. This strengthens links between theory and workplace application.
- Leaders have created a Learning Centre that provides a supportive learning space for apprentices. This facility enables learners to access additional support and provides a quiet study space that is particularly helpful for apprentices who struggle to learn in noisy, busy environments.
- The provider delivers Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) which strengthens progression routes into MAs. This widens access to apprenticeship opportunities and supports future recruitment.
- Staff make effective use of employability initiatives, including the Glasgow Guarantee, to widen access to training and employment, strengthen alignment with local workforce priorities and broaden participation.
- Leaders and staff work well with Qualifications Scotland to adopt an innovative direct observation approach. Apprentices demonstrate competence and reflect on how their practice aligns with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice, the Health and Social Care Standards, theory, and meta skills. This strengthens reflective practice and improves the quality of assessment evidence.

Areas for development

- There are no formal arrangements in place for the evaluation of learning and teaching. As a result, opportunities to identify and share effective practice and drive improvement are limited.

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- Staff engage well in quality assurance and standardisation meetings to review learner progress, assess the impact of programme delivery and assessment practice, and agree actions for improvement.
- Leaders have revised recruitment arrangements to include face-to-face interviews and engagement with organisations that support young people into work and training, such as Working Rite. These arrangements have improved learner awareness and readiness for entering apprenticeships.
- The provider offers professional learning opportunities that support staff well to respond to apprentice, employer and sector needs. These include arrangements to meet the needs of apprentices who have additional support needs (ASN); applying inclusive practices; and utilising communication aids such as Makaton. Staff engage well in professional learning and assessors benefit from these opportunities to keep up to date with current practice and developments.
- Assessors are empowered to take ownership of aspects of curriculum development and delivery. Assessors value this approach and report that they feel trusted and encouraged to contribute to improvements to programme content.
- Leaders promote apprenticeship opportunities proactively and effectively. They celebrate learner success and make good use of digital communication channels to share news and updates about their programmes. This raises the profile of apprenticeship pathways and enhances engagement with employers and prospective learners.
- Assessors design and develop learning and teaching materials effectively. They adapt materials appropriately to meet the individual needs of apprentices and collaborate effectively with colleagues to share resources across the team.

Areas for development

- Data gathered on learner recruitment, retention and attainment is not used systematically to inform improvement.
- Self-evaluation arrangements are at an early stage of implementation. It is therefore too early to assess the impact on learner outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and planning for improvement.

Element 2 Delivery of training – Good

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Most apprentices and employers confirm that the duration and pace of the apprenticeship programme provide apprentices with appropriate incremental development of knowledge, skills and occupational competences.
- Almost all assessors use a broad range of assessment approaches effectively to enable apprentices to demonstrate both theoretical knowledge and occupational competence. Apprentices report that the range of learning activities prepares them well to apply their learning within childcare settings.
- Almost all apprentices report that both on and off the job learning activities are well-structured, relevant to industry practice, and increase their professional knowledge and practical skills.
- The design of the apprenticeship programme meets the operational needs of employers and the wider childcare sector. All employers report that apprentices develop relevant occupational skills, increase their confidence, and make a positive contribution to workplace practice.
- Most assessors support apprentices effectively to select optional units that align closely with their specific roles and responsibilities. This ensures learning is relevant and supports development within their current workplace context.
- Assessors make good use of digital platforms such as Onefile and Microsoft Teams (MST) to support and enhance the delivery of learning. Almost all apprentices state that staff ensure that MST is accessible and provides useful links to a range of learning resources.
- Most employers receive helpful communication and support from assessors throughout the programme. They value this professional engagement and report that they are kept well informed about apprentices' progress and development.
- Leaders and assessors have responded appropriately to identified gaps in knowledge relating to child development. All apprentices now complete the child development unit as part of the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) programme. This strengthens professional knowledge and enhances workplace practice.

Areas for development

- A few apprentices experience barriers to completion of optional units if they change workplace settings. This disrupts continuity in learning and hinders progression.
- A few employers are not provided with sufficient opportunity to discuss optional unit choices.
- A few apprentices report delays in the marking and return of submitted work and in the

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His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

allocation of new tasks. This limits their ability to lead and accelerate their own learning.

- There are no systematic arrangements for the communication of actions taken in response to stakeholder feedback. This limits stakeholders' awareness of how their views contribute to improvements in programme delivery and the overall learning experience.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices who participate in monthly off-the-job learning sessions develop significant professional knowledge and understanding of childcare practice. They articulate clearly how this learning enhances the quality and effectiveness of their work.
- Almost all assessors provide high-quality constructive feedback that is supportive and developmental. Apprentices value this feedback and use it effectively to inform continuous improvement and steps towards sustained progress.
- Almost all apprentices use their digital learner portfolio confidently to track their progress, access resources, and evidence achievements. This helps apprentices develop responsibility and independence in their learning.
- All apprentices participate in regular three-monthly review meetings with their assessor. These meetings are used effectively to monitor progress and respond to individual learning needs. Almost all apprentices have a clear understanding of the progress and the requirements needed to successfully complete their programme.
- All assessors contribute effectively to standardisation and internal verification arrangements. They draw productively on these activities to ensure assessment standards are consistent and in line with awarding body requirements.

Areas for development

- Arrangements for the training and development of workplace mentors are not consistent. As a result, the quality of support provided to apprentices across different settings is variable.
- Apprentices on the MA programme are not sufficiently aware of opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experience to influence and inform improvements in training delivery.

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices participate in a well-structured, two-stage induction programme involving provider staff, assessors, apprentices, and workplace mentors. The programme provides new apprentices with clear knowledge of programme expectations and the range of learner support services available to them.
- Apprentices who require additional support, benefit from well-planned adjustments and targeted interventions. Assessors use appropriate resources effectively to identify

individual barriers and adapt their approaches to meet specific needs.

- Most apprentices confirm they have an identified workplace mentor who provides an important and supportive role in helping them to develop confidence, engage productively in workplace learning, and plan for progression.

Areas for development

- A few apprentices are not supported to attend consistently monthly off-the-job learning sessions. This impacts negatively on their ability to progress in their learning.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes – Good

QI 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- The overall rate of apprenticeship achievement for 20 years-old plus in 2024 and 2025, were at 87.5% and 84.2%. These are significantly higher than SDS's 75% achievement target. National achievement rates for this age group were at 79.1% in 2024 and 82.2% in 2025.
- Recruitment for apprentices with disabilities have been above SDS national average over the last two years.
- All apprentices make effective use of Experiential Play meta skills resources to identify areas of strength and areas for development. They use this resource well to reflect on their progress, recognise and capture increases in competence, and understand how these skills contribute to workplace performance and professional development.
- Almost all apprentices state they would recommend the apprenticeship programme to others. This reflects positive feedback from learners and their confidence in the quality of training provided.

Areas for development

- The overall rate of apprenticeship achievement for 16 to 19-year-olds in 2024 and 2025, were at 50% and 64.9%. These are lower than the SDS 70% achievement target. National achievement rates for this age group were at 71.2% in 2024 and 75.9% in 2025.
- Recruitment to the apprenticeship programme over the last three years is predominately female with male recruitment significantly below national averages.
- Recruitment of care-experienced apprentices was below SDS national average in 2024-25.

- There are no arrangements to capture feedback from apprentices who withdraw early from their programme. This limits the provider's ability to identify and draw on the reasons for early withdrawal to initiate actions to improve learner retention.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices report that participation in the MA programme increases their confidence in the workplace. They confirm that training provides them with the knowledge and skills required to perform their job roles effectively.
- A few apprentices demonstrate clear understanding of learning pathways and progression opportunities to higher levels of study linked to employment. This benefits these apprentices to make informed decisions about career planning and longer-term professional development.

Areas for development

- Most apprentices do not receive sufficient information or support regarding progression routes and employment opportunities. Overall, advice on employability skills and preparation for interview is limited, which restricts the ability of apprentices to plan and prepare for the next stages of their career.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are identified:

- Leaders should support staff to improve apprenticeship retention and achievement rates where they are low.
- Leaders should ensure the strategic plan incorporates clear and measurable actions that enable effective monitoring of impact and support future planning for improvement.
- Leaders should ensure identified actions resulting from self-evaluation arrangements are reviewed regularly and that actions for improvement are communicated effectively to all stakeholders.
- Leaders should ensure that the workplace mentor role is clearly defined and mentors receive appropriate guidance, training and ongoing support to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
- Staff should ensure that apprentices exiting the programme receive appropriate support and guidance, including advice on progression and next steps.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

The provider has introduced an innovative approach to direct observation that strengthens reflective practice and enhances the authenticity of assessment.

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 inspection.

Karen Stevenson
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.