

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs)

Apprenticeships have proved over the years to be a hugely valuable route to employment for many people, and created in many industries a skills pipeline that has delivered a stronger workforce.

Apprenticeships can take from around 6 months to 3 years to complete; there are no set timescales for completing an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are flexible and can be delivered in a variety of ways including on-the-job training and block release/day release etc.

There are four levels of MAs (2, 3, 4, and 5) which represent the level of Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) that an apprentice can achieve and the job that an individual does. Apprenticeships sit on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework SCQF from levels 5-12.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is responsible for administering the funding for apprenticeships which for 2012/13 was £75m (an increase of 24% in real terms since 2008/9). In 2012/13 there were 70 types of apprenticeships available across a range of occupations. The Construction sector had the highest number (3,357) of new apprentices in 2012/13.

The annual number of new apprenticeship starts has more than doubled since 2008/9 to 25,691 in 2012/13 (50% of these were 16-19 year olds, 27% were aged 20-24 and 23% were aged 25+). The [SDS Modern Apprenticeships summary data](#) (Table 1) below shows the gender split and achievement levels for 2012/13.

Table 1

All MAs	Female	Male	Total
Starts	11,040	14,651	25,691
In training	12,006	23,900	35,906
Leavers	11,214	14,738	25,952
Achievements	8,538	11,383	19,921
Achievement %	76%	77%	77%

Source:

http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/744202/modern_apprenticeships_summary_information_2012-13.pdf

Further background information and detailed statistical analysis can be found in Audit Scotland's [Modern Apprenticeships](#) report published in March 2014.

Current Involvement of Colleges in Modern Apprenticeship Programme

Colleges are already involved in some way or another in the delivery of a very large number of MAs. Although colleges are only directly contracted by SDS for a small portion of the MA programme, there is a large 'hidden' involvement of the college sector.

A large part of colleges' involvement in the MA programme is through the practice of some organisations contracting directly with SDS for MAs and then subcontracting some or all of the MA's training element to colleges. This type of provision varies widely, from providing training to support a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ), to health and safety training prior to apprentices going into workplaces, to more general *Skills for Work* type delivery.

Colleges Scotland recently surveyed colleges about their involvement in the MA programme. 23 colleges responded to the survey, together reflecting 90% of college activity across Scotland. The survey showed that together these colleges had been directly awarded just over 2,500 MA starts by SDS, or approximately 10% of the total MA starts that SDS award each year. However, the survey also showed that these colleges were expecting to be involved in training almost a further 3,000 MAs in 2013/14 through subcontracting. As these figures only reflect instances where there is some sort of formal agreement between the college and the other organisation holding the MA contract, it is possible that the 'hidden' involvement of colleges in the MA programme is even greater. When colleges are delivering part-time courses to students, for example stand alone SVQs or health and safety courses, they may not always be made aware that the student is also a MA or apprentice of some sort.

The survey also highlighted that there was a large amount of unmet demand from colleges to be involved in the MA programme (see table 2 below). Over recent years there was a large difference between the number of contracts that these colleges had bid for, and the number that they had been awarded. For example, in 2012/13 the surveyed colleges had collectively been willing to deliver 56% more MA starts than they had been awarded. In 2011/12 there was a willingness to deliver an extra 84% more starts.

Table 2

SDS Financial Year (April to March)	Delivered in 2011/12 (AY)	Delivered in 2012/13 (AY)	Estimated for 2013/14 (AY)
<u>Where College Holds SDS Contract</u>			
Total MA starts that were <u>bid for</u> by these colleges (by headcount of starts):	4,330	3,682	3,630
Total MA starts that were <u>awarded</u> , to these colleges (by headcount of starts):	2,358	2,359	2,513
Percentage extra starts these colleges were willing to deliver:	84%	56%	44%

The [*Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce \(Interim report\)*](#) published in September 2013 made a number of recommendations for improving MAs, which the college sector welcomed.

Firstly, the distribution of the MA programme is structured through a complex annual tendering process. This is a resource intensive process for SDS, colleges, training providers and employers, and creates unpredictability and risk in the system. In the short-term, in pursuit of the Commission's aim of expanding colleges' involvement in the programme, colleges would welcome opportunities to work with the Commission, the Scottish Government and SDS to reduce the bureaucratic burden of applying to the system. In particular, some form of highly trusted status for those organisations who are applying on a regular basis would be a positive step.

The suggestion in the interim report that colleges are evaluated for their involvement in the MA programme through the regional outcome agreements, is a positive suggestion.

However, in the long-term, the college sector would welcome further consideration of the possibilities presented by moving MA contracting to a need-based system, where MA contracts are allocated much more closely on the needs of the local economy and young people. Current patterns of allocation, for example, do not necessarily match youth unemployment patterns across Scotland. Colleges, post-regionalisation, are ideally placed to bring together the needs of employers and young people on a local level and put in place the necessary training support. In particular, when specialist provision requires sustainable capital investment and maintenance and when employment and career options for specialist staff needs to be recognised, the annual tendering process undermines effective planning, investment and efficiency. A further advantage of this shift would be for colleges to take a much greater role in facilitating and supporting local employers to identify their skills needs and potential solutions. This is particularly the case for SMEs who often have little available human resource (HR) capacity. Colleges would welcome opportunities to take a greater lead role in regional skills investment planning, which SDS have been working toward for some time, and post-regionalisation colleges are ideally placed to do so.

The creation of national advanced skills networks is a further proposal which would support the Commission's goal of increasing the involvement of colleges in the MA programme, and of the development of advanced vocational skills opportunities in general. Perhaps starting in the key sectors, advanced skills networks would bring together colleges involved in similar areas of advanced delivery. This would allow colleges to develop national networks of skills excellence that were able to support large national employers with local skills solutions. The Energy Skills Partnership provides one model for this, but a flexible approach would allow the strongest possible interaction between skills networks and employer groupings, such as industry leadership groups. This would interact well with the regional nature of colleges, allowing vocational skills to be delivered to support local needs, as well as to support national high-level skills requirements. This would also support the Commission's objective of greater alignment of the MA programme with the national key sectors.

In general, the college sector welcomes proposals to increase the scale of the MA programme, over time. Successful apprenticeship systems with strong take up are a key feature of those European countries that are doing better than Scotland in terms of tackling youth unemployment. However, any expansion should be firmly based, as the interim report suggests, on a continued commitment to improving the quality of apprenticeship training. The college sector agrees that there is a particular need to work with employer bodies to expand the number of higher level MA frameworks, particularly at Level 4 and above. It would also be useful to involve professional bodies and universities in discussing how to take forward this part of the interim report.

Quality of Modern Apprenticeships

Fundamentally, the college sector sees the MA system as a combination of education, employment and training, agreed between employee and employer, and with a training provider on hand to facilitate the relationship and provide specific education and training support. The MA pathway, as noted by the Commission, is increasingly seen by employers and young people as a valuable and positive route. Indeed, there are a number of instances across Scotland where there are extremely strong examples of this kind of partnership bearing fruit, with colleges being involved in the delivery of some of the most successful and prestigious MA programmes in Scotland. A common thread is a strong partnership between the college and the employer, with the college kept closely up-to-date with workforce planning, and the college able to draw expertise, advice and facilities when designing and delivering specific training components for the employer.

However, whilst there are some examples of 'gold-standard' apprenticeships, which are highly regarded (i.e. have a level of parity of esteem), this is not consistent across the MA programme. In order to take the whole of the programme to another level, achieving greater parity of esteem with other pathways, it will be necessary to look at the quality of education and training that is currently used to support the MA programme.

The college sector therefore welcomes the proposal from the Commission that Education Scotland's responsibilities should be extended to cover the MA programme. Given that extensive external quality assurance arrangements are in place to cover academic pathways, providing equivalent scrutiny of vocational pathways will help support greater parity of esteem in educational terms for the MA programme. The precise details of how an external quality assurance system is developed for the MA programme will be important. An assurance system will need to take account of the core principles of the MA, and also, as far as possible, the core features of external assurance in comparable parts of the post-16 education system. There are a number of college staff who are heavily involved in the design and delivery of the MA programme, and the college sector would be pleased to assist in the implementation of these proposals.

As there is currently no external quality assurance of the MA programme, there is an incomplete picture of the quality of delivery of MAs in Scotland. However, as outlined below, there is some evidence that the quality of the educational experience for the apprentice, defined in broadest terms, can be variable.

SDS carries out its own surveys on the MA programme and reports strong satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the fundamentals of the MA programme. SDS's [Modern Apprenticeship Outcomes 2012](#) report found that 70% of apprentices were very satisfied with their apprenticeship, and 87% were either satisfied or very satisfied. Similarly, the SDS [Modern Apprenticeship Employer Survey 2012](#) found that over half of employers (54%) involved in the programme that had been surveyed would strongly recommend MAs, and a further 28% would recommend with some reservations, constituting a total of over 80% who would recommend MAs.

However, the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) report [Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2011](#), which surveyed more than 2,000 apprentices in Scotland, showed some stark figures in terms of apprenticeships in Scotland:

- 1 in 7 MAs surveyed (14%) were receiving no training (neither on-the-job nor off-the-job) at all as part of their MA.
- A further 37% of MAs surveyed were only receiving on-the-job training.
- In total, more than half (51%) of MAs surveyed were receiving no training other than during their everyday work.

The college sector would like all apprentices to be provided with a guarantee that their educational experience includes off-the-job training, to provide them with a theoretical and general education that can support their lifelong career progression and mobility. This should sit alongside and support the apprentice's on-the-job training. This could be based on a minimum requirement for the equivalent of a certain amount of training per month, in relation to the length of the apprenticeship. This would compare well with the European countries (such as Germany and Switzerland) where the apprenticeship systems are strongest, and the youth employment rates highest, and where all apprentices receive specialist and general off the job education in order to supplement the training that they receive in the workplace.

The college sector has concerns on the current length of apprenticeships. Correspondence between SDS and the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee¹, shows that there is huge variation in the length of time it takes to complete MAs. For example, it took the 942 young apprentices (16-19) who completed the Level 2 in Retail in 2011/12 an average of just seven months to complete. Nor is this simply a matter of level of apprenticeship, with Level 3 apprenticeships in Information and Communication Technologies and in Youth Work taking young apprentices an average of just 10 months to complete. At the other end of the spectrum, MAs at Level 3 in Construction, Electrotechnical Services and Engineering were all taking an average of almost four years for young apprentices to complete. Level 2 apprenticeships in Vehicle Maintenance and Repair and in Construction were also taking young apprentices on average more than 20 months to complete.

Whilst some variation in length is a good thing, reflecting variety in prior qualification and the fact that the apprentice can learn at their own speed, such huge variation presents concerns about lack of consistency in the quality of delivery in the MA programme. In particular, the very short length of time that some courses are being completed in is a cause for concern, and raises questions about whether these apprentices are genuinely getting a rounded education experience that will set them up for a successful future career. This is something that the Commission should look more closely at, and consider whether there is a case to be made for tighter standards on the length of MAs.

Colleges Scotland: This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. To discuss, or for further information, please contact:
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¹http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/General%20Documents/Danny_Logue_Letter.pdf