

# Quality Assurance National Thematic Report 2025-26

## Meta-Skills

A report on the quality of *Meta-Skills* delivery within Modern Apprenticeships

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# 1. Executive Summary

This report examines how meta-skills are being delivered across Modern Apprenticeship provision in Scotland. It brings together evidence from a range of sources to provide insight into current practice, strengths and areas for improvement, to support ongoing quality enhancement of meta-skills delivery.

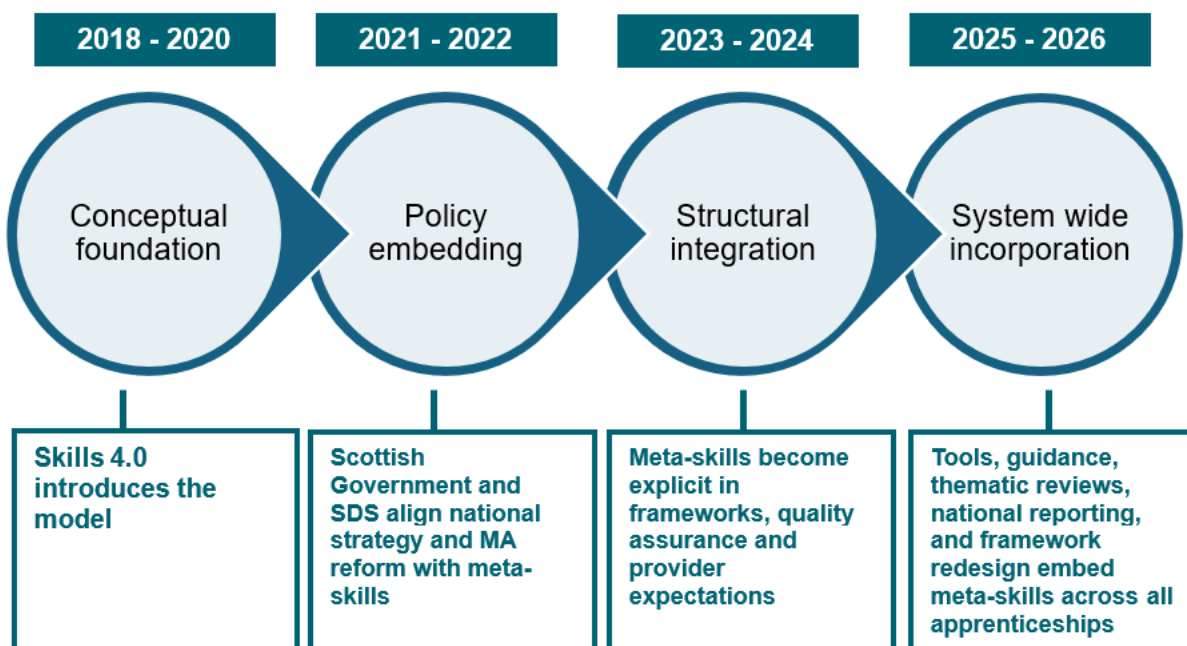
## Context

Skills Development Scotland published the paper [Skills 4.0 - A skills model to drive Scotland's future](#) in 2018 which set out the context in which work, and the nature of the workforce, is changing. It is well documented that individuals and businesses will need to develop meta-skills that support learning, improvement of existing skills and development of new ones, and that these should be a key goal of apprenticeship delivery.

This paper introduced the concept of “meta-skills” and identified them as **“timeless, higher order skills that create adaptive learners and promote success in whatever context the future brings. A meta-skill is a high order skill which is a catalyst for learning and building new skills faster.”**

This became the conceptual foundation for embedding meta-skills across Scottish skills policy and signalled a need for the apprenticeship system to shift from purely technical competencies to future-proofed human capabilities.

In the subsequent eight years, Scotland’s apprenticeship system has evolved from conceptual adoption to full systems integration of meta-skills with key milestones outlined below:



## Methodology

This report brings together a range of evidence on the delivery of meta-skills across Modern Apprenticeship provision.

The primary source of evidence is a *thematic review of meta-skills delivery* across a sample of 31 SDS contracted Modern Apprenticeship learning providers. The thematic review was informed by qualitative fieldwork undertaken between August and December 2025, comprising interviews with provider staff, employers and apprentices. The thematic review explored how providers approach the design and delivery of meta-skills. For more detail on the thematic review methodology, please see **Appendix 1**, and for a list of the learning providers included in the review please see **Appendix 2**.

Alongside this, the report draws from existing *SDS quality assurance activity*<sup>1</sup>. An analytical summary of this material identifies how meta-skills had previously been evidenced, discussed and evaluated across the wider provider network.

By integrating findings from the thematic review with existing intelligence, the report seeks to strengthen the overall evidence base on meta-skills delivery. Taken together, these sources allow for an interpretation of current practice and support more robust conclusions about how meta-skills are being embedded across apprenticeship provision, as well as where further development and support may be required.

## Conclusions

Across the evidence collected, there is strong momentum in embedding meta-skills across the MA landscape. Overall, apprentices, learning providers, and employers increasingly recognise the value of meta-skills as essential, transferable skills that underpin successful development in learning and work. Many apprentices articulate how meta-skills are developed through everyday workplace activity and demonstrate growing confidence in reflecting on their progress over time. Where meta-skills are introduced early, embedded consistently, and reinforced through structured reflection, apprentices show stronger ownership of their development and greater ability to evidence their skills meaningfully.

Strong delivery is characterised by clear and consistent use of meta-skills language, integration of meta-skills into induction and learning resources, purposeful reflection activities, and active collaboration with employers. In these contexts, meta-skills are not treated as an additional requirement but are embedded as a natural and valuable part of the apprenticeship journey.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the annual *Learning Provider Apprenticeship Report* received by each provider. The report provides a concise evaluation of provider quality, delivery, and learner outcomes, and is used to support monitoring and improvement.

However, the findings also highlight areas where practice is less consistent. In some cases, apprentices and employers hold only a partial understanding of meta-skills, and opportunities to reinforce their value are not always fully realised. Variation remains in how meta-skills are introduced, reflected upon, tracked, and recognised across frameworks, providers, and subcontracted provision. Where reflection and progress review processes place limited focus on meta-skills, apprentices can struggle to see their development holistically or understand their distance travelled.

Strengthening employer awareness, involvement, and alignment with workplace performance processes remains an important area for further development. Where employers understand, value, and actively lead on development their apprentices' meta-skills, apprentices' benefit from richer workplace learning opportunities and clearer links between development and business benefit.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that while strong foundations for meta-skills delivery are in place across the system, further work is required to ensure consistency, depth, and shared understanding. The recommendations set out in this report provide a clear framework for learning providers, employers, and SDS to build on existing strengths, address identified gaps, and support continuous improvement.

## 2. Perceived Value of Meta-skills

This theme reflects the extent to which apprentices, employers, and provider staff recognise the value and importance of meta-skills.

Our vision is that meta-skills in all Scottish Apprenticeships are recognised and valued by employers, apprentices and learning providers for creating real opportunity and shared benefit for apprentices themselves, businesses and the wider Scottish economy.

### Where are we now

Meta-skills are generally recognised as important, particularly by apprentices and provider staff. Apprentices commonly view meta-skills as lifelong, transferable skills, essential to being effective in their current role and adaptable in future careers. Many apprentices can clearly articulate how meta-skills are developed through day-to-day workplace activities, such as problem-solving, communication and initiative.

Employers who understand and engage with meta-skills clearly value them as contributing to:

- Workforce adaptability and resilience
- Improved communication, problem-solving and leadership
- Talent retention, succession planning and progression

## Future enhancements

- **Strengthening the embedding of meta skills across stakeholders:** The perceived value of meta skills is not consistently realised or embedded across all stakeholder groups. In some cases, while the value of meta skills is understood in principle, it is not sufficiently reinforced through delivery practice, employer engagement or formal recognition. Strengthening these elements would mean that meta-skills development through apprenticeships delivers visible and valuable benefits to both the apprentice and the employer, enabling individuals not only to be competent in their role, but to perform as adaptable, reflective and well-rounded contributors in the workplace.

## 3. Awareness and Understanding of Meta-skills

This theme examines whether apprentices know what meta-skills are, how confidently they use the language, and the extent to which this understanding is reinforced by providers.

Our vision is that every Scottish apprentice will develop a deep, confident and continually strengthening understanding of meta-skills - what they are, why they matter, and how they can be purposefully applied and evidenced in the workplace - so that meta-skills become a natural, integrated and valued part of their learning journey, professional identity, and long-term employability.

### Where are we now

Apprentices demonstrate a clear understanding of meta-skills, developed through their early introduction at induction and reinforced through consistent use of meta-skills language. Examples of effective practice include:

- inclusion in PowerPoint presentations and induction packs.
- use of flyers and bespoke materials to support understanding.
- resources to support apprentices in identifying and developing their meta-skills from the outset of their learning journey.

The use of reviews and reflective discussions encourages apprentices to identify the meta-skills relevant to their role, articulate how they apply them in the workplace, and reflect on activities that support further development. Structured tools, such as self-assessment checklists, and guided reflection help apprentices recognise and track their ongoing progress.

### Future enhancements

- **Improving apprentices' understanding of meta-skills:** In some cases, apprentices demonstrate only a partial or surface-level understanding of meta-skills and their relevance to their learning and workplace practices. Using language that is comfortable for the provider, employer and apprentice; while ensuring it is linked back to meta-skills would support deeper understanding.

- **Ensuring consistent use of meta-skills terminology:** There is variability in how providers introduce and use meta-skills terminology. A more consistent approach would help apprentices develop a clear understanding and apply the language confidently.

## 4. Embedding & Implementation of Meta-Skills

This theme assesses how effectively meta-skills are embedded into delivery and workplace activities.

Our vision is that learning providers will support apprentices on their meta-skill journeys in a way that is embedded, consistent, and authentically connected to workplace practice - empowering every apprentice to confidently understand, develop, evidence, and apply their meta-skills as part of their apprenticeship experience.

### Where are we now

Providers are actively embedding meta-skills in learning and workplace activities, enabling apprentices to develop these skills in authentic, context-specific ways. Assessors routinely encourage apprentices to connect everyday tasks to relevant meta-skills, and reflective activity is built into the learning journey through logs, reviews and discussions that prompt apprentices to recognise progress over time.

At the outset of training, apprentices identify priority meta-skills linked to their role and aspirations, helping to focus development in meaningful and personalised ways. Providers design tailored resources and learning plans that integrate meta-skills. Examples include:

- handbooks with meta-skills summaries.
- skills check documents and profiling tools.
- scorecards for apprentices.
- visual guides and bespoke modules / courses.
- Many providers are also actively using SDS tools such as the [meta-skills wheel](#).

### Future enhancements

- **Ensuring early introduction and profiling of meta-skills:** In some cases, apprentices are not introduced to meta-skills or supported to complete profiling activities at an early stage. Establishing this earlier in the programme would help apprentices understand expectations and consider their development sooner.
- **Improving consistency in the use of reflection resources:** The tools used to support meta-skills reflection vary across apprentices and frameworks. More consistent use of resources would help ensure all apprentices benefit from opportunities for reflection and development.
- **Strengthening staff awareness and capability:** Some provider staff do not fully recognise the benefits of meta-skills or indicate a need for further training. Enhancing staff knowledge and confidence would support more effective delivery and reflection for apprentices.

- **Improving consistency in subcontracted delivery of meta-skills:** Within some subcontracted provision there is a limited focus on meta-skills activities. Strengthening expectations and ensuring consistent approaches across subcontracted partners would help maintain good quality of delivery and a consistent learner experience.

## 5. Employer Engagement & Integration into Workplace Practice

This theme focuses on the role of employers in contextualising and reinforcing meta-skills within day-to-day workplace practice.

Our vision is that employers of all Scottish apprentices lead, and work in genuine partnership with learning providers, to embed meta-skills into all of their apprentice employees' workplace practice—signposting meaningful opportunities for apprentices to apply, develop, and evidence these skills, supported by informed, engaged employers who recognise and reinforce their value as part of their business ethos.

### Where are we now

Employers play a constructive and supportive role in helping apprentices develop and apply their meta-skills. Employers recognise the value of meta-skills in building a stronger workforce. They offer meaningful workplace opportunities where apprentices can develop their skills, while giving them the time and encouragement needed to grow.

Strong collaboration between employers and providers ensure that workplace activities align with both development goals and organisational needs. Employer feedback through reviews and ongoing conversations further strengthens apprentices' progress in key meta-skills.

### Future enhancements

- **Enhancing employer understanding and engagement:** In some cases, employers have only a partial understanding of meta-skills or are not fully engaged in supporting the development of apprentices in this area. Strengthening employer awareness - and employer endorsement - of the power of meta-skills would help ensure more consistent support for apprentices.  
There is also scope to strengthen employer involvement by developing more structured communication and engagement opportunities that highlight the value of meta-skills for their businesses and support ongoing feedback— for example regular newsletters, shared resources, or networking opportunities that foster stronger provider–employer connections.
- **Improving alignment with employer performance processes:** Meta-skills are not always reflected within employer appraisal or performance management systems. Incorporating them more systematically would help reinforce their importance and recognise apprentices' progress in a formal workplace context.

## 6. Progress Review & Tracking of Meta-Skills

This theme considers the processes and systems used to track apprentice progress, including reflective discussions, goal-setting, and apprentice progress review activity involving assessors and employers.

Our vision is that all learning providers ensure apprentices' meta-skills journeys are continuously reviewed, clearly evidenced, and meaningfully tracked through structured reflection, high-quality documentation, and collaborative input from assessors and employers - enabling every apprentice to understand their progress, identify next steps, and confidently demonstrate their development over time.

### Where are we now

Reflective practice is well embedded and supports apprentices to recognise how their meta-skills develop and apply within the workplace. Progress reviews create a structured space for joint discussion between apprentices, assessors and employers. Examples of effective practice include:

- Coaching apprentices to connect everyday tasks to specific meta-skills and prompt ongoing self-assessment.
- Apprentices selecting specific meta-skills to focus on and revisiting them in subsequent reviews.
- A range of reflective tools and resources - from logs and self-assessments to development plans – to help apprentices identify strengths, areas for improvement, and track progress over time.
- Employer involvement in Apprentice Progress Reviews further reinforces the workplace relevance of meta-skills and supports a rounded perspective on development.

### Future enhancements

- **Increasing the focus on meta-skills within progress reviews:** Apprentice Progress Reviews do not always give sufficient attention to meta-skills, and structured goal-setting is not consistently embedded. More explicit reference to meta-skills would help apprentices plan their development more effectively.
- **Enhancing employer contribution to reviews:** In some cases, employer input is limited, reducing opportunities for apprentices to connect workplace activity to their meta-skills development. Strengthening employer participation would help ensure reviews reflect the full context of learning and workplace practice.  
In a few instances, apprentices are unaware of written feedback provided by their managers. Improving communication around feedback would help apprentices understand their progress and where further development is needed.
- **Improving systematic tracking of meta-skills:** Although meta-skills are discussed, they are not always recorded or tracked. More consistent

documentation, or signposting to where they are tracked, would provide apprentices with a better understanding of their development over time.

- **Maintaining regular and timely progress reviews:** Where reviews took place less frequently, it is more difficult to assess progress or sustain momentum in meta-skills development. More consistent scheduling would support ongoing reflection, goal-setting and monitoring.

## 7. Self Evaluation & Ownership

This theme focuses on apprentices' motivation, reflective habits, and their active engagement in identifying and developing their meta-skills.

Our vision is that all Scottish apprentices confidently lead their meta-skills development by engaging in honest self-evaluation, setting meaningful goals, and taking ownership of their learning journey - supported by clear tools, structured reflection, and collaborative guidance that empowers them to recognise their progress and shape their future growth.

### Where are we now

Apprentices show good levels of self-evaluation and ownership of their meta-skills development. They identify the specific meta-skills they want to improve and set goals that reflect their workplace and individual needs.

This autonomy is supported through structured processes and tools, such as logs and self-assessments, which help apprentices monitor progress and take responsibility for their development.

### Future enhancements

- **Strengthening end-of-apprenticeship reflection:** Some apprentices are not supported to reflect on their distance travelled at the conclusion of their apprenticeship. A more structured end-point reflection would help apprentices consolidate learning and recognise their progression.
- **Expanding opportunities for independent self-assessment:** In some cases, apprentices have limited chances to undertake self-assessment independently. Providing more independent self-assessment activities would support greater ownership and understanding of progress.
- **Introducing a formal midpoint self-evaluation stage:** For some providers, there is no structured self-evaluation checkpoint at the midpoint of the apprenticeship. This would create a clearer opportunity for apprentices to review their development and adjust approach to evidencing their journey.
- **Enhancing recognition and celebration of achievement:** In a few instances, there is no clear mechanism for acknowledging apprentices' progress or achievements. More visible recognition could strengthen motivation, confidence and engagement.

## 8. Recommendations

To strengthen the quality and consistency of meta-skills delivery, learning providers should:

- **Strengthen shared understanding and consistent use of meta-skills language**  
While apprentices and providers generally recognise the value of meta-skills, understanding remains uneven across the system. A consistent, plain-English approach to meta-skills terminology should be embedded across induction, learning delivery, progress reviews and workplace conversations to support confident articulation, shared understanding and meaningful application by apprentices, employers and staff.
- **Ensure early, structured introduction and profiling of meta-skills**  
Meta-skills should be introduced and profiled at the earliest stage of the apprenticeship to help apprentices understand the value and power of meta-skills in supporting their development, workplace integration and performance. Early identification of meta-skills, linked to the apprentice's role and aspirations, enables more focused learning, reflection and progress over time.
- **Improve consistency in embedding and evidencing meta-skills across delivery**  
Strong practice shows meta-skills are most effective when treated as an integral part of learning rather than an additional requirement. Consistent use of reflection tools, learning resources and structured prompts across frameworks, including subcontracted provision, ensures all apprentices experience a coherent, high-quality approach to meta-skills development.
- **Strengthen employer engagement and alignment with workplace practice**  
Employers play a critical role in reinforcing meta-skills through meaningful workplace opportunities and feedback. Greater consistency is needed in employer understanding, engagement and alignment of meta-skills with workplace performance processes, to strengthen the link between meta-skills development and business benefit.
- **Increase the focus, quality and consistency of progress review and tracking**  
Progress reviews provide a key opportunity to reassert the power of meta-skills, consolidate learning and support apprentice confidence. Reviews should place more explicit emphasis on meta-skills, supported by structured goal-setting, clear documentation and meaningful employer input. More systematic tracking of meta-skills development will help apprentices understand their progress and distance travelled over time.
- **Strengthen apprentice ownership through structured reflection and recognition**  
Apprentices generally show good levels of ownership of their meta-skills development; however, this can be further strengthened. Apprentices should actively consider and seek opportunities to further apply and develop their meta-skills capabilities. Moreover, providers should introduce clearer midpoint and end-point reflection stages, expanding opportunities for independent self-assessment, and improving recognition of achievement will support deeper reflection and confidence in evidencing development.

### **Employers should continue to:**

- Actively promote the value of meta-skills as critical to workforce resilience, adaptability and progression, making the business benefits explicit to apprentices and managers;
- Align meta-skills to company values, behaviours and employee development.
- Provide structured opportunities for apprentices to apply and reflect on meta-skills in day-to-day workplace activity, supported by informed mentors and line managers;
- Contribute meaningfully to progress reviews, offering clear, timely feedback that links workplace performance to meta-skills development; and endorse the development of meta-skills in apprentice's journeys.
- Embed meta-skills more consistently within workplace performance and appraisal processes to reinforce their importance and recognise apprentice progress.
- Support the formal recognition of meta-skills through employer-led certification of apprentice development, and provide supporting testimonials that evidence the value and impact of meta-skills in the workplace.

### **SDS will:**

- Continue to raise national awareness of meta-skills and their value through clear, accessible messaging for providers, employers and apprentices;
- Strengthen and refresh meta-skills resources and guidance to support consistent delivery, reflection and tracking across frameworks;
- Share effective practice more systematically, drawing on thematic review findings to support continuous improvement and peer learning; and
- Use quality assurance activity and national intelligence to reinforce expectations around consistency, employer engagement and apprentice experience, including within subcontracted provision.

## **9. Effective Practice Exemplars**

### **Aberdeen Association of Social Service**

Apprentices are exceptionally well supported in developing their understanding of meta-skills through structured reflection, this is achieved using an evidence-gathering form that prompts them to link workplace tasks to specific meta-skills and evaluate their effectiveness. This approach is highly valued by apprentices as it encourages them to consider what went well and where improvements can be made, deepening their awareness and promoting meaningful skill development.

Meta-skills are effectively embedded into the initial assessment process, with staff linking identified support needs to relevant meta-skills within the support plan. One apprentice highlighted how this targeted focus helped them better understand their own development and build confidence towards a support need they initially felt uncomfortable about, resulting in a personalised and empowering start to their learning journey.

### **Aberlour Child Care Trust**

The provider offers apprentices excellent support in developing their meta-skills. This is supported through the use of an evidence-gathering form that prompts learners to detail workplace tasks they have completed in relation to specific meta-skills, and to assess how these skills supported them and where they could be improved. Apprentices complete CPD plans related to meta-skills and participate in structured discussions at quarterly reviews to evaluate progress. The provider also offers ad hoc study sessions, during which guidance and support are provided to attendees on various subjects, including meta-skills. This process provides opportunities for apprentices to consider successful areas and identify potential improvements, increasing awareness and encouraging skill development.

The provider's induction is highly effective, featuring a general overview of meta-skills, followed up with series of group activities that engage apprentices in using meta-skills, and is complemented by structured reflection that enables each apprentice to identify the meta-skills they have applied during these tasks. This tailored approach actively supports a range of learning styles by combining experiential, collaborative, and reflective methods to ensure all apprentices can meaningfully connect with and understand these skills.

### **Babington Business College Limited**

The provider delivers a holistic and future-focused apprenticeship programme. From the outset, apprentices are empowered to take ownership of their learning, with meta-skills terminology and reflective practice embedded from induction through to completion.

A robust and effective approach to meta-skills development is evident across the majority of apprenticeships, regardless of whether meta-skills are formally embedded within the framework. This approach is further strengthened by employer engagement where meta-skills typically align with company values and behaviours. Opportunities to recognise individual achievement—through internal awards—enhance motivation and visibility of progress.

The provider's commitment to continuous improvement is deeply embedded across delivery teams. Staff collaborate to contextualise standardised meta-skills tools and guidance for each framework, ensuring relevance and consistency. A systematic self-evaluation process, incorporating feedback from staff and stakeholders, is conducted annually, involving a 'deep dive' quality assessment. This includes a review of core themes such as meta-skills, which has yielded extremely positive insights from learners. Quantitative and qualitative data show that almost all learners rate their understanding as 'exemplary' or 'strong', with comments highlighting the value of tracking their development over time—such as "great to look back on distance travelled" and "encouraged a lot of reflection as well as pushing areas that wouldn't have previously been considered."

To future-proof the programme, key staff are reviewing initial assessment processes to further integrate meta-skills into programme design. A Meta-Skills Progression Framework has been developed and is ready for piloting. This innovative tool will

provide apprentices with a visual representation of their current/ target achievement levels, and progress over time. For Skills Coaches, the tool will support them to assess the apprentice's reflective practice in alignment with the level of their apprenticeship.

The provider also makes strategic use of meta-skills case studies to inform decision-making during Scottish Apprenticeship Week, reinforcing its reputation for excellence. These collective efforts foster confidence, autonomy, and career mobility among apprentices and are recognised as a unique selling point of the provider's apprenticeship offering.

### **BAE Systems Plc**

BAE deliver an apprenticeship programme focussed on developing their workforce to provide the skills and knowledge required for the business both now and in the future. From the initial stages of their training, apprentices are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning and development with opportunities for future career progression clearly outlined. Meta-skills terminology and reflective practice is successfully embedded from the outset with discussions and self-reflection incorporated into induction sessions. Feedback from apprentices is regularly gathered both informally and through progress reviews and Menti surveys. This provides confirmation that meta-skills are understood by apprentices, and they value the opportunity to develop these skills.

All first-year apprentices at BAE Systems have the opportunity to attend an outward-bound week at Loch Eil in the Highlands delivered by The Outward Bound Trust. Apprentices participate in different activities designed to build self-awareness, motivation and resilience. These activities (for example gorge walking and raft building) are linked to the eight BAE Behaviours which include time management, focusing, motivating and inspiring and adapting. BAE staff also attend the outward bound week and at the end of each activity work with the apprentices to discuss the meta-skills which they have been using and developing during the task. Apprentices complete a reflection log / workbook to record their activities and progress. This not only reinforces the information on meta-skills delivered at programme induction but also offers excellent opportunity for apprentices to reflect on their meta-skills progress and identify goals for future development. All apprentices interviewed were very enthusiastic about the outward bound week, noting the range of challenges they were presented with and the high levels of motivation and satisfaction on successful completion of the course.

### **BPP Holdings Limited**

BPP Holdings Ltd has implemented a comprehensive and user-friendly Meta-Skills Development Log designed to support apprentices in tracking and enhancing their Meta-Skills as they progress through their qualification. This resource enables apprentices to complete and record self-assessments at the start, midpoint, and end of their programme, rating proficiency across 12 meta-skills on a 10-point scale. Results are visually represented through a radar diagram, helping apprentices identify strengths and areas for development. In addition to self-assessments, the log captures tasks completed within the programme and workplace experiences that contribute to meta-

skill development over a three-month period. These entries serve as evidence and discussion points during progress reviews. Apprentices are expected to share the log one week prior to each review, ensuring both they and their assessor are fully prepared. Consolidating self-assessments and the Meta-Skills Log in one document creates a growing portfolio of development evidence. This structured approach makes progress explicit, supports targeted goal-setting, enhances motivation, and ultimately improves the quality of the learning experience.

### **GTG Training Limited**

The provider has demonstrated exceptional practice in their approach to meta-skills development. From the start of training, apprentices are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning and development. Meta-skills terminology and reflective practice is integrated into the apprenticeship programme from the outset. The “language” of meta-skills is incorporated into delivery in a consistent manner at all “touch points”. Consistent use of words such as curiosity, integrity and collaborating during initial assessment; induction; progress review meetings; in learning resources; off the job training lesson plans; workbooks, and day to day conversations, embeds meta-skills in a natural and simple to understand way. This supports apprentices well to view meta-skills as an integral part of learning and development rather than a “bolt on” to a qualification.

Excellent use is made of visual aids to support learners to reflect on their meta-skills development. Individual posters are displayed throughout the training workshop, one for each meta-skill, as an effective aid to learners. Each poster offers a short definition of what the meta-skills element is and asks a question e.g. “Curiosity – How good are you at asking the right questions?” with explanations of “what it’s all about”. This is an excellent example of how the provider uses simple language to support the apprentice to understand meta-skills in the context of their training.

A further example of where meta-skills is integrated into everyday activity is in the training centre. PowerPoint slides used for training presentations have colour coded meta-skills labels incorporated into the slide deck. This helps apprentices to understand which meta-skills they might be using in a specific task or activity and aids reflection on completion of the unit. Lesson plans for each day are displayed throughout the training centre for each group of learners and these also incorporate the language of meta-skills, further highlighting their natural integration into training delivery.

An output of a previous apprentice project, the Meta-skills Mini is an excellent example of how the provider is demonstrating exceptional practice in developing meta-skills. A refurbished Mini car has been customised with decals promoting each of the twelve meta-skills and is on display in the automotive training workshop. On completion of practical activities, apprentices are encouraged to use the car as a visual aid to discuss what meta-skills they have been using. This is a very effective approach to encouraging self-reflection and supports the discussion of meta-skills in a natural way within the context of classroom training. Clear links between this discussion and progress review meetings further embed meta-skills into programme delivery.

To future proof the apprenticeship training programme, GTG are reviewing their delivery of meta-skills across all of the different frameworks as part of their robust self-evaluation cycle. Involvement of staff and stakeholders provides appropriate opportunities to reflect on what is working well and how they might further enhance their practices going forward.

### **MGT Training Ltd**

MGT Training Ltd has demonstrated exceptional practice in embedding meta-skills development and reflection into apprenticeship delivery through strategic and sustained engagement with employers. Their long-standing relationships with a diverse range of employers - built on trust, confidence, and consistent delivery of high-quality training - position them as a leading provider in the sector.

The provider's multi-layered communication strategy has been instrumental in raising the profile of meta-skills. By engaging stakeholders at all levels - from head office to divisional meetings and frontline managers - they ensure consistent messaging and employer buy in. Their approach is dynamic and ongoing, and in one example, tailored marketing materials for an employer that articulate the benefits of modern apprenticeships, with meta-skills development as a key element, in the employer's own language.

Most employers interviewed as part of the thematic review have embraced meta-skills as a natural extension of their continuous professional development frameworks. While the terminology may be new to some, the underlying principles resonate strongly with existing practices. All employers recognise the value meta-skills bring in boosting apprentice confidence and enhancing workplace contribution.

Most employers also play an active role in shaping the meta-skills focus by identifying role relevant skills, setting expectations, and providing feedback; in a few cases, helping apprentices recalibrate their self-assessment to better reflect their actual performance.

MGT Training Ltd has facilitated employer-led initiatives that support meta-skills development through exposure to new workplace experiences. Employers shared examples, such as facilitating an apprentice to lead a work shift with structured support to build leadership capabilities, departmental rotations to broaden skillsets, and mentoring and coaching embedded within daily operations.

One employer described how career progression pathways within their organisation are naturally aligned with meta-skills development. Upon completion of an apprenticeship, apprentices are often considered for promotion opportunities. When a promotion is secured, there can be potential for the individual to undertake a higher-level modern apprenticeship, providing new opportunities to further develop and refine their meta-skills in line with the demands of their evolving role. This transition is underpinned by a shared understanding of the elevated skill expectations required for the next stage of learning, and the importance of meta-skills development now and in the future. As a

result of these efforts, employers not only value meta-skills development but also recognise its strategic importance for workforce capability.

## PA Training

The provider has demonstrated exceptional practice in their approach to meta-skills with a clear commitment from the staff team to delivering high quality meta-skills development opportunities to all apprentices. Meta-skills language and terminology, and reflection on personal development is integrated into the planning and delivery of training from the outset. Consistent use of words such as initiative, creativity, adapting and focusing during initial assessment; induction; progress review meetings; training workshops and PowerPoint presentations embeds meta-skills in a natural and simple to understand way. As a result, apprentices view meta-skills as an integral part of learning and development in the workplace, with all apprentices demonstrating a clear understanding of the terminology and how meta-skills are being developed.

The provider has successfully incorporated meta-skills into their excellent resources for both apprentices and employers. Resources include the Induction session PowerPoint presentation; Guidance for Mentors and Employers; the Reflective 7 Practice workshop and the Mentor Workshop PowerPoint presentations. Information on meta-skills is presented in a consistent and easy to understand format and their relevance to the apprentice, employer and mentor is clearly explained. This provides an ongoing “golden thread” through the programme at all stages of delivery with both apprentices and employers.

PA Training schedule a programme of monthly workshops for all apprentices, each one covering a specific topic relevant to the qualification units. The Reflective Practice Workshop focuses on the benefits of reflection, identifying opportunities to reflect in the workplace and personal development planning. Apprentices work together to discuss examples of what works well, challenges faced and what can be changed or improved in their workplace setting. Meta-skills are successfully incorporated into this training workshop, encouraging apprentices to make effective use of reflective tools and techniques. Workshop activities include an exercise to “Use reflection to review your own knowledge, skills attitudes and behaviour” and “Reflect on how any life experiences and personal beliefs might affect your work”. Apprentices have the opportunity to discuss the individual elements of the meta-skills framework and link these to their own development within the workplace setting. They very much value the opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion where they can share each other’s “lived experience” in a childcare setting and create their own informal network of support. Meta-skills is a key element of this workshop discussion, and Post-It Note feedback from a recent workshop clearly demonstrates that apprentices see the value of this session in relation to their own development.

PA Training take a very proactive approach to employer engagement with regular surveys issued to seek feedback from them. As a follow up, the provider hosts online employer meetings to discuss the feedback. The meeting agenda includes topics of interest to employers such as health and wellbeing resources, updates on the sector. Meta-skills development is also part of the agenda. This provides useful opportunities to

highlight to employers the benefits of meta-skills development for both the apprentice and the employer's business.

### **QA Limited**

QA Ltd have developed a range of high-quality resources that successfully support meta- skills delivery, providing staff and learners with clear guidance on how meta-skills are integrated into MA programmes and tools that support delivery. The provider has developed a comprehensive Meta-skills Mapping document that maps individual meta skills to each unit of the apprenticeship frameworks they offer. This is a useful reference document that supports effective delivery that meets requirements. The Meta-skills Road Map outlines the process at Induction, 3 months, 6 – 9 months and 12 – 18 months providing a clear and comprehensive guide to how and when meta skills are assessed. The road map also includes details of evidence requirements, clearly outlining what the learner must demonstrate to meet the assessment criteria. The Meta Skills Journey PowerPoint slide deck is a key resource to upskill delivery staff and ensure they have the necessary knowledge and understanding to deliver meta-skills. Information on meta skills requirements; how to introduce and assess meta skills; and best practice questions for professional discussions is clearly documented ensuring a comprehensive and consistent approach to staff training.

A Programme Launch slide deck (one for each apprenticeship framework) is presented at the commencement of training also includes information on meta-skills, with links to further resources that learners can access. An Introduction to Meta-skills slide deck provides detailed information for learners on useful resources relating to meta skills including links to SDS and SQA websites and resources. The slides also introduce the Development Log, with clear guidance on how to access the Log and what to expect in relation to Professional Discussions.

### **Sarah Dalrymple Consultancy Ltd**

Sarah Dalrymple Consultancy has developed a robust and user-friendly Meta-Skills self-reflection resource that supports apprentices in tracking and developing their meta-skills throughout their learning journey. This resource is structured around a three-stage self-assessment process, capturing apprentices' self-evaluated scores for all twelve meta-skills at the initial assessment, mid-point, and upon completion. The self-assessment uses a clear 0–5 scale and is introduced during induction, ensuring apprentices understand the process from the outset.

Each of the twelve meta-skills is accompanied by accessible definitions and practical examples. The resource includes detailed descriptors and visual guides, making expectations transparent and supporting meaningful reflection.

Self-assessment scores are visually represented on a radar chart at each stage. This cumulative plotting allows apprentices to compare their progress over time at a glance, making improvements and areas for further development immediately visible. The radar chart not only quantifies growth but also encourages ongoing dialogue between apprentices and their assessors about skill development. This resource empowers apprentices to take ownership of their personal and professional growth, fosters self-

awareness, and provides a structured, evidence-based approach to measuring improvement in Meta-Skills. By making progress explicit and easy to track, the resource motivates apprentices, supports targeted goal-setting, and enhances the overall quality of the learning experience.

#### **Treasure Island Nursery Limited (ta Step Up)**

Apprentice support - The learning provider demonstrates exceptional commitment to apprentice support, fostering both professional and personal growth. Apprentices describe this support as “brilliant” and “helped me become the confident person I am today”. This reflects a proactive and empathetic approach that goes beyond formal requirements. An example highlighted where contact was maintained after the apprentice had completed a prior qualification and moved to a new employer which supporting their wellbeing and was greatly appreciated. Such dedication highlights a learner-centred ethos, building trust and rapport and reinforcing confidence and resilience in apprentices.

#### **Virtual Learning Academy Limited (trading as Highland Learning Academy)**

The learning provider has introduced an innovative approach to supporting apprentices' development of meta-skills through the creation of the Meta-Skills Self-Reflection Survey. Issued and completed digitally ahead of each progress review, this resource encourages apprentices to independently reflect on the meta-skills they are applying and developing within their job role as they progress through their apprenticeship. By fostering independent reflection, this practice ensures that progress review discussions are more informed and purposeful. This enables both the apprentice and tutors to prepare effectively to enhance the quality of these conversations. This structured, proactive approach empowers apprentices to take ownership of their learning, deepen their reflection on meta-skills, and create opportunities for meaningful feedback and goal-setting during progress reviews.

## Appendix 1 – Thematic Review Methodology

SDS undertake thematic quality reviews which are short reviews focussed on a specific topic in relation to Modern Apprenticeships. The key aims of this review, focused on Meta-Skills, were to find out:

- The level of ownership/agency that apprentices have in relation to their own meta-skill development;
- The value placed upon apprentice meta-skill development respectively by apprentices, employers and learning providers;
- The extent to which employers are involved in supporting meta-skill contextualisation and development in at key stages – on entry, in delivery on exit;
- The extent to which the apprentices' reflective practice around meta-skills feature within workplace performance management process and its contribution to the development of competence;
- Approaches undertaken by learning providers which are deemed as effective practice and can be replicated in some way by other apprenticeship delivery agents;
- Any differences in practice for specific themes e.g. framework area (including new style frameworks where meta-skill development evidence is mandated through the qualification), age of apprentices, type of provider;
- The capacity and capability of our current learning provider base and the employers they work with to be ready to meet the future needs for Scottish Apprenticeship quality delivery; and
- Obvious areas of recommendation where effort needs to be focussed to improve the positioning of meta-skills in apprenticeship development of frameworks and delivery

31 providers were included in the review activity, and a list is included in **Appendix 2**.

The review activity was carried out by a team of four SDS Work-based Learning Quality Advisers. The approach was one of interviewing a range of staff from learning providers, apprentices and employers.

The findings of each of the reviews have been brought together in this national report which is designed to inform relevant stakeholders about the quality of meta-skill delivery within Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland. The report should assist learning providers in developing quality improvement and enhancement activities and includes examples of effective practice identified during the review. In total, the review team interviewed:

- 85 apprentices;
- 133 learning provider staff; and
- 69 employer staff.

## Appendix 2 – Provider Sample (Thematic Review)

The 31 providers included in the thematic review were:

- Aberdeen Association of Social Service
- Aberlour Child Care Trust
- Ankerville Nursery (AIness) Ltd
- Babington Business College Limited
- BAE Systems Plc
- BPP Holdings Limited
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Scot Training Services Ltd (ta Angus Training Group)
- Esteem Training Limited
- Fife Council
- Firsthappy Limited
- GP Strategies Limited
- GTG Training Limited
- Inspiro Learning Limited
- Karen and Vincent Bell Training Limited
- Leonardo UK Ltd
- McSence Communication Ltd
- MGT Training Ltd
- Microcom Training Limited
- PA Training
- Perth & Kinross Council
- Pine Trees Child Care Limited
- QA Limited
- Safety Training Solutions Ltd
- Sarah Dalrymple Consultancy Ltd
- SG Training Group Ltd
- Stirling Council
- The Tell Organisation Limited
- Treasure Island Nursery Limited (ta Step Up)
- Tullos Training Limited
- Virtual Learning Academy Limited (trading as Highland Learning Academy)