SDS SE exemplar 2025-26

Service Delivery

Topic	Full Question	Describe what you do	Evaluate what you do	What do you want to enhance	Grade
Initial Assessment & Recruitment	How effective is your approach and methodology to appropriately match individuals to Modern Apprenticeship pathways, ensuring that prior learning and tailored support needs are met?	We always have an initial engagement with individual employers and therefore identify gaps for training of each individual. When we meet employers, we discuss their needs and input to the programme to ensure they are fully aware of requirements such as initial assessment of apprentices. All potential MA learners complete an application form. Prior to starting on the programme, we meet each learner on a 121 basis to understand their motivations, Additional Support Needs (ASN) and any other requirements. At this session they undertake a half hour "off the shelf" assessment package which gives us a baseline on their core skills, personal development needs and learning style. All Business and Administration	The initial engagement with employers in our apprenticeship programme works well. This allows us to identify the appropriate "optional units" in our apprenticeships and to plan individual schedules of delivery and assessment according to employer needs. The online skills assessment and aptitude testing for engineering apprentices enables us to measure learners' current levels of aptitude to ensure that they have the appropriate skills to complete the qualification. This ensures that we are getting apprentices on the right units for them and their employer. Early identification of gaps in Core Skills enables us to fully utilise naturally occurring evidence		Amber

		learners are employed and are referred by the employers to the programme. Assessors meet potential learners and their supervisors initially in the workplace to discuss job role and duties and to understand how this matches the apprenticeship framework requirements. Engineering MA learners apply for the qualification and complete an online skills assessment and aptitude test in the office to determine whether they have the correct skills and aptitude to be an engineer. They are also interviewed by the senior assessor. The Individual Training Plan (ITP) is reflective of any additional support required by the learner, and this is shared with appropriate staff. We run an SQA Navigator report for all learners during the initial assessment phase to identify prior learning and achievement, including Core Skills.	and map this to the Core Skills units for our apprentices. Although meta-skills are not a requirement of the framework(s) we currently deliver, we are looking to introduce these as part of the initial assessment process to further improve how we positively plan a tailored programme for each individual. We are very good at identifying where adjustments are required for different individuals, particularly those who require delivery and assessment adaptation through our diagnostic approach and 121 sessions.	Although not a requirement for the frameworks offered, we do not currently include metaskills in our initial assessment of learners.	
Learning and Assessment Planning /	How effective are your approaches to	**Learning and Assessment Planning**	**Learning and Assessment Planning**		Green

| Learner Goal Setting and Progress | learning and assessment planning; induction; learner goal setting and progress? | The results from initial assessment and discussion with the employer are used to inform a learning plan (LP) for each learner. LPs are completed by assessors with the learners. Individual additional support for learning is identified and this is recorded on the LP and sessions for additional support as well as regular support are planned in. Support that we have used in the past includes using coloured paper to support learners with dyslexia and utilising 1-1 support opportunities for learners with anxiety. Staff have been able to identify local support agencies and have received advice from the local adult literacies network on how best to support learners with dyslexia and dyspraxia. Assistive software is available for learners while in centre if required. Core Skills for the Engineering MA are delivered by a subcontractor as part of year 1 of the qualification. Core Skills for Business and | Our LP and assessment plan paperwork (including learner BRAG status log) works well to allow apprenticeship assessors to review early set targets and revise according to each individual's pace of learning. Our adapted learning plan documentation allows us to plan effectively and the sessions we do to take time to sit down with learners on a 121 to do this are a very good use of time for the apprentices. Survey feedback from apprentices indicates they value this time and support. We effectively tailor and individualise the planned learning for everyone. The software that we have in place has been utilised by a small number of learners, and this has supported them to successfully complete specific assignments. Links with adult literacies have meant that we have been able to support individual learners with dyslexia to successfully complete their programme. Our | | |

| | | Administration learners are delivered internally. Core Skills for Business and Administration are fully contextualised, and where possible we try to embed the assessment of the Core Skills into the delivery and assessment of the units. For the Engineering and Business and Administration frameworks, learners complete their qualification using an electronic portfolio. This includes all of the information that learners need to complete the qualification including resources, framework documents and unit breakdowns making it easy to access for them. We use social media in a number of ways to support learner progress. For example, we have qualification / programme specific WhatsApp groups for peer support; and our assessors use Facebook Messenger to keep in contact with learners. We also use our Facebook and Twitter pages to | partnership with System X is particularly effective in supporting learners who require assistive technology for dyslexia as they offer a package of the technology as well as support in using it for our team. Use of the EAL portfolio ensures that it is always the most up to date version and meets with the current industry standards. Social media has proved to be a useful tool for our assessors / tutors to maintain regular contact with the learners, and this means that we have sometimes been able to support learners to sustain their MA through social media contact. The resources and equipment made available by ourselves and the college for our Engineering MAs are modern and meet with current industry standards ensuring apprentices are learning on up-to-date equipment. **Induction** All learners receive a comprehensive | | |

		share useful information with learners and employers. Learners can contact and support each other with aspects of their programme and have fed back that this helps them to feel that they are part of a group of learners even when they are in the workplace. We sub-contract our SVQ level 6 and core skills elements of our Engineering MA delivery to Glasgow Training College. **Induction** All learners receive an induction book related to their programme of study which includes detailed policies and procedures, including re-assessment, data protection and health and safety. Learners are also introduced to their assessor / tutor during their induction and contact details and methods of communication are shared with them. For the Engineering MA we have one start date per year, and all learners are brought into the centre for a group induction prior to starting at college.	induction into their MA programme. The introduction of the induction handbook and its associated tutor induction handbook has been particularly effective as it allows us to ensure that all of our staff are providing a consistent and high standard induction and staff know when/if they have missed anything. **Goal Setting and Progress** Combining the flexible approach with the formal review process ensures that apprentices are clear about their targets, remain motivated and make planned progress in line with these targets. Learner feedback says that they feel that they receive the appropriate support to help them to complete their programme. Learners find that being able to relate the Core Skills to their job role means that they make more sense to them, and they understand how to apply them better. Learners are able to		

| | | All learners receive information on the format of the course, and we discuss unit choices with them. This is planned with the employer to ensure that the learner has time put aside for this, and the employer is also involved when selecting units. **Goal Setting and Progress** In our apprenticeships, assessors discuss upcoming work tasks with the apprentice's supervisor and plan staged learner targets in line with this. We use a progress log document which can help us to track "at a glance" how well an individual is progressing in relation to their original LP. It also makes it clear when someone is falling behind from the original planned milestones set. Formal Reviews for all apprentices are carried out every 13 weeks, although assessors consider individual learner support requirements, and this dictates the frequency of interim | progress quickly through these units. Keeping a log of when supervisors haven't taken part allows us to flag this with senior staff. | | |

		meetings with learners. We use the SDS documentation to record formal discussions but have developed more tailored templates to support a record of progress between the 13-week period. We ask MA supervisors to participate in the reviews and maintain a log of where this has not happened. Assessors contact supervisors when they have not participated in a review to allow them to feed in at a later point where necessary. The review meetings are used well to reflect on achievement of previous targets and to set clear, realistic goals to be completed before the next review.			
Employer Involvement	How well do you involve employers and their staff (or your own staff if you have an "employer" contract) in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of your apprenticeship provision.	**Delivery** We make a conscious effort to understand the employer's business and their training requirements with programmes tailored to meet their needs. Our Assessors are the key contacts for employers and their workload is allocated based on their specialist	**Delivery** Employers confirm that our approach to employer engagement supports in-depth discussions around pathways/units which meets their needs. We use our excellent employer relationships to identify gaps in provision in order to offer frameworks		Green

| | | knowledge of the employer's specific engineering discipline. At the outset, a visit will be made to premises to gain an understanding of their business, products and services and there is encouragement for employers to tour the Training Centre to see what's on offer. All of our learners are recruited by the employers. As part of the process, employers refer learners to us to complete the engineering aptitude test and initial assessment after following their own recruitment practices. The results from initial assessment and discussion with the employer are used to inform a learning plan (LP) for each learner. Dates about peak work activity and shift patterns from employers are used to inform assessment plans for apprentices. Apprentice inductions are arranged with the employer to ensure that the learner has time put aside for this, and the employer is also involved when | which address local demand. This was the principal reason for extending our offering to include the Business and Administration framework. Employers feedback that identifying gaps in provision and offering frameworks that address local demand has helped them to recruit hard to fill vacancies, and once recruited, staff are more likely to stay in the roles. Involvement of the employer and learner from the early stages ensures that the course content is closely mapped to the work activities undertaken by the learner. As a result, the evidence required is easily obtained and contextualised for the learner. Employers appreciate the opportunity to take part in the review process and find it useful to give feedback and receive updates on learner progress. Engineering employers respond well to our marketing letters with most of our starts being | | |

		selecting units which allows us to plan individual schedules of delivery and assessment according to their needs. New employers all receive an induction which includes discussions about their roles and responsibilities, particularly in years 2-4 for the Engineering MA when the learner is work based. Assessors discuss upcoming work tasks with the apprentice's supervisor and plan staged learner targets in line with this. Quarterly reviews are seen as a key touchpoint to engage employers in the learning process. Our employer database facilitates ongoing communication, including marketing letters to inform them of the programmes and places on offer. We complete an annual survey with our employers to find out whether they are happy with the provision, and whether there is anything that they would change. **Pathways and Progressions**	recruited through this channel. We have been able to change things in response to employer feedback. Some employers fed back that they would like more flexibility in the timings of assessor meetings, as their staff work shifts. We have been able to vary the times that the assessor meets with the learners to cover unsociable hours. Employers are grateful of this change and learners who work these shifts are making faster progress. **Pathways and Progressions** We are fortunate that our employers are highly invested in apprenticeships, in the case of engineering committing to a 4-year training programme for their apprentices. We track our apprentice destinations and, with the exception of a small number of early leavers where we endeavour to support their transition or, even rarer, in the case of individual performance issues,		

		A key feature of our business strategy is to provide our employer network with a one-stop shop and meet all their training needs. We do this by providing information to them on funding and progression routes for individuals. We utilise 13-week reviews with the apprentice and their supervisor to look at future career and progression pathways. This becomes more relevant as the apprentice nears completion of their qualification with options such as Technical Apprenticeships in Engineering, Graduate Apprenticeships in Engineering and opportunities to progress through academic qualifications discussed. Where we are not able to support the progression, we signpost employers to suitable providers.	all apprentices go on full-time positions with their companies and around a third return to the Training Centre for further training. Our proactive engagement is designed to empower employers and learners to make informed decisions that lay the groundwork for long-term career success.		
Equality	How effective are you at working with employers to raise awareness of those with protected characteristics and	We have a targeted recruitment plan that involves employers as part of the local DYW forum to encourage females into	Close links have been established with the local DYW group which has fed into our staff training strategy and as a means of		Amber

	care experienced backgrounds to influence recruitment and engagement of a diverse workforce.	Engineering and males into Business & Administration. The Senior Assessor takes the lead and meets with the Chair of the local group to understand what is happening in the employer network and discuss how our training provision could contribute to their plan. We have shared SDS' Inclusive Recruitment guide with our employer network to encourage positive action and diversity as they bring in new talent into the sector. Through the DYW group, we have established links with local schools and also work with external equality partners to profile vacancies on behalf of employers in order to increase the numbers of starts from SDS E&D key target groups. Admin staff keep a record of our starts and break these down by E&D group. Our team has a standing team meeting agenda item to discuss partner engagement and identify new	networking for the MA programme. As a result of our targeted recruitment, we have noted an increase in applications and starts from males in our Business and Administration MA's. We have been successful in increasing recruitment of BME learners to our MA programme. All staff are tasked with relaying any new potential partner organisations to the team for consideration. We have very good partner relationships and partner feedback indicates that they prefer to have one point of contact in the organisation. Staff feedback is positive regarding E&D training which has now been adopted as part of the induction process for all new staff. We believe this has contributed to an increase in more diverse groups applying for our programmes. Staff feedback that the SDS Equality resources are easy to use and provide them		

| | | opportunities for partnership working. We assign a small partner portfolio to each member of staff, and this includes the individual taking responsibility for attendance at appropriate forums and cascading information back to the team. The staff training strategy includes an annual refresh of E&D training. A staff training /CPD day took place in December where DYW staff presented policies and strategies. As part of this, we identified how our approach contributes to the DYW objectives for our Engineering programme, including the requirement to promote the programme more widely to female candidates. Staff have also undertaken unconscious bias training. We have established partnerships with agencies who provide specific support for learners who have barriers to learning. We effectively tailor and individualise the | with valuable information and contacts to provide support for learners. Links with adult literacies have meant that we have been successful in supporting individual learners to achieve their qualification using a range of tools to address learners' unique requirements. However, we are finding an increasing need for more specialist support in the area of mental health. In order to build the confidence of our team and support apprentices, we will prioritise activities in the coming year. | The range of partners we work with at present do not offer the specialist support that is required for apprentices with more complex support needs. | |

		planned learning for everyone. All staff have access to the SDS Equality Guides and Resources, and these are accessed to support learner needs when required. Assistive software is available for learners while in centre if required.			

Leadership and Quality Culture

Topic	Full Question	Describe what you do	Evaluate what you do	What do you want to enhance	Grade
Continuous Improvement in Delivery & Performance	How good is your performance and how good are you at monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your delivery of Modern Apprenticeships?	**Approach to Continuous Improvement** We have a number of approaches to delivering continuous improvement in our provision by engaging all key stakeholders. We have quarterly meetings which all assessment and coaching staff attend. Meetings cover learner and programme progress, what's working well in delivery and assessment, standardisation across assessors for assessment practice, partnership working, what needs fixed and relevant improvement actions. We carry out peer observations on direct delivery sessions, assessments and	**Approach to Continuous Improvement** Our regular staff meetings really help us to focus on what matters most and, by recording, we are able to track improvements in delivery. We have implemented a number of ideas across the service from staff reflection, such as the use of a job matching tool to ensure that the learner and employer select the units that best fit the job role. Peer observations work well as they encourage staff to identify and share effective practice. This approach, along with the Internal		Amber

		reviews. The Internal Verifier also carries out observations of all delivery and assessment staff at least once per year.　　　An annual staff away day is held to focus on continuous improvement. Progress against the action plan is a standing item at our monthly operational meetings and this helps us to focus on items that need to be progressed or reviewed. Staff have individual KPIs which are set at the beginning of each operational year in line with SDS contractual requirements. We have a robust staff induction process and handbook in place and, as part of this, the Senior Assessor delivers coaching on the SDS contract delivery requirements. We review the induction process and the handbook on an annual basis to ensure amendments to the SDS contract rules are updated. We have a bank of qualified staff we can call on should the need arise. All delivery staff are qualified, experienced	Verifier observations helps to ensure consistency of quality in all of our delivery and assessment approaches. This also helps us to identify any gaps in our provision, and to source appropriate CPD to ensure that all staff have the right skills to deliver high quality provision. The staff focus group ensures that all staff are able to contribute their views and an action plan is created from the findings. We have anecdotal feedback from staff that they appreciate being involved in evaluation discussions and this has resulted in a more rounded continuous improvement plan. Staff feedback on the induction process is positive, and they feel well prepared for undertaking the role. We have good staff retention rates which allows us to have consistency of service for employers and learners. We have an effective Business Continuity Plan which has enabled us to cover short term		

		and occupationally competent in the various areas of the training services. Staff structure and individual roles are subject to on-going review and refinement in line with operational demands and requirements. Until this year, self-evaluation has been completed by the Senior Assessor. For this cycle, we have dedicated time to ensure all SDS delivery staff are involved in the process. Through surveys we involve learners, employers, subcontractors and partners (for example local Jobcentre Plus) to seek their views on our delivery and use the feedback to inform improvements in delivery. We hold focus groups using a trained facilitator to support us in this. To inform our bid for an SDS contract, the senior assessor considers LMI and RSA information as well as output from employer engagement. The Skills Investment Plan for Engineering enabled us to use in discussions with employers regarding the benefits	absence with no negative impact on learners by using bank staff. The range of staff qualifications and experience means that we are able as a business to be responsive to employer and learner demand. Reviewing the SIP for engineering, the RSA for the areas we operate in coupled with reviewing SDS asks in their ITT documentation has encouraged us to consider expansion in the engineering and Business Admin areas. It has also helped us to consider how we fit in with the bigger industry "asks". We take a proactive approach to understanding the industry skills requirements for Engineering and as a result we are contributing to the improvement of learning associated with this sector. The Service Level Agreement works well with regard to the contractual expectations of the subcontractor, and they fulfil all of the		

		of employing an M.A. v graduates. We participate in the Engineering Skills Group and through SEMTA have been involved in developing new MA frameworks. Analysis is carried out annually as part of the staff training day and findings are shared with all staff. Glasgow Training College deliver the sector specific SVQ @ SCQF level 6 and core skills for our Engineering apprentices. A Service Level Agreement is in place which documents our expectations of the college – this includes scheduling of training, attendance, monitoring, achievement, health & safety. etc. We have formal meetings between the Lead Assessor and Senior Engineering Lecturer in November, February and May each year with a set agenda to review candidate progress, college performance and discuss any additional needs. Any actions arising from this are documented and reviewed at subsequent meetings.	requirements of them in this area. Communication is open and honest, ensuring that any issues are discussed and resolved quickly. We involve college staff in our self-evaluation activity. Most CPD events are well attended by our subcontractor, and this helps to ensure a consistent approach across our own delivery and our subcontracted provision. **Using KPI data** Analysis of our Key Outcomes are as follows: -**Apprentice achievement** In the 2 years we have been delivering Business and Administration qualification, our achievement rates have been above the national benchmark, the proportion achieving has improved year on year. During the Covid pandemic, we had seen a number of engineering apprentices being made redundant which impacted on our achievement rates. However,		

		Sub-contractor staff are invited to attend CPD opportunities that we have sourced. We have been able to change things in response to employer feedback. Some employers fed back that they would like more flexibility in the timings of assessor meetings, as their staff work shifts. We have been able to vary the times that the assessor meets with the learners to cover unsociable hours. Employers are grateful of this change and learners who work these shifts are making faster progress. **Using KPI data** Analysis of our Key Outcomes are as follows: -**Apprentice achievement** We have been delivering the Business and Administration MA for only 2 years, so are only able to show trends over this period. There has been a downward trend in the percentage of Engineering learners who have successfully completed their qualification, and for the current contract year, this sits at 76%	recruitment levels have now returned to pre-pandemic levels and we expect to see year-on-year improvement. **Diverse recruitment** We have identified the following trends regarding the key equality groups: The participation rate of individuals from a BME background has remained static over a three-year period and is above the national average. •The participation rate of disabled apprentices has steadily improved over the last three years and is well above the national average. •The participation rate from care experienced individuals has remained static over a three-year period but remains slightly above the national average. •The Engineering programme has been predominantly male over the last three years and the Business Administration framework predominantly female.	Participation rates of female apprentices on our Engineering programme is below the SDS national average. Participation rates of male apprentices on our Business Administration	

		which is in excess of the national benchmarks (70% for 16-19 year olds and otherwise 75%). **Diverse recruitment** We monitor the proportion of learners commencing on our programmes from the key equality groups. **External Verification reports** are discussed during quarterly meetings, and we action any recommendations highlighted. **Using perception (feedback) data** **Stakeholder feedback** We send an annual satisfaction survey to employers electronically, and only 45% complete it. In the last year, we have set an internal KPI for a 75% response and 90% of employers reporting that they are satisfied with the programme delivery. We send all apprentices an annual satisfaction survey with an internal target that 75% will complete it and satisfaction levels of a minimum of 90% are maintained.	EV visits and reports are always very positive. Recommendations are used to make improvements to our assessment approaches – these have reduced over a three-year period from 3 to 0. There have been 2 examples of good practice identified. In addition, we use external research including the Education Scotland report into the Engineering sector and have adopted some of the identified good practice in this. We now ensure that learners have an identified mentor in the workplace, and that the mentor is effective in supporting the learner. To monitor this, we have regular meetings with the mentor. **Using perception (feedback) data** **Stakeholder feedback** While employer satisfaction has improved steadily over a 3-year period and overall levels of 88% in 2023-24, this is not yet meeting our internal KPI. This breaks down to	programme is below the SDS national average. The response rate for our employer satisfaction survey is 45% which is below our internal target of 75%. Employer satisfaction levels were 88% last year which is below	

| | | | employer satisfaction for the Business and Administration MA programme at 95% and the Engineering MA programme at 82%, the latter below our internal KPI. Levels of apprentice satisfaction are very positive, being in excess of set targets and show an improving trend -from a response rate of 80% in the last year, 92% were satisfied with the programme. Learner feedback on the SVQ element delivered by Glasgow Training College is similarly positive. Our learning facilities are high quality, modern and industry standard which ensures that practical work carried out is relevant to the learner's workplace. We also ensure that feedback is used effectively to make changes to our programme content. For example, we established that engineering learners had not received sufficient information about the structure of the college element of learning. We undertook a review of | our internal target of 90%. | |

			our induction process and have included a specific session on "What to Expect at College". This has enabled our employers to gain an assurance that we are committed to continuous improvement activity.		
Fair Work First	How effective are you at committing to Fair Work First Practices for all employees whether permanent, temporary, or sub-contractors involved in the delivery of this contract. This should include current and planned actions that show how you will embed these practices during the lifetime of this contract.	We understand that staff are our biggest asset and investment in them ensures that not only are we treating them fairly in line with the principals of Fair Work but this will contribute to their delivery of an excellent service for our apprentices and employers. 1. Effective Voice – Our team work well together and share core values. We ensure there is transparency and consultation on issues impacting them which is done on both an individual and team basis. Our culture is one of encouraging input regarding organisational direction, delivery and performance. Examples include team meetings and the annual away day. Line Managers hold regular	We measure our progress against the Fair Work Employer Support Tool which recognises us as 'improving', our average score against the key themes having increased from 3.65 in December 2022 to our current score of 4.50 (out of five). We will continue to use this tool to report on and demonstrate progress during this contract for planned actions.Our approaches build trust and engagement and allow us to make collective decisions regarding the direction of the training centre and individual roles within this. Examples relate to offering the Business and Administration qualification and ongoing discussion/agreement		Green

		121s and staff appraisals giving opportunity for discussion of goals, performance, development and any issues. 2. Investment in workforce development – a culture of learning and development exists and we provide a number of resources to maximise staff potential. Event attendance/networking is encouraged to ensure practice is current with the team keen to share learnings in support of apprentices. Most recently, our Senior Assessor completed Safeguarding training and will upskill the team and become our designated Protection Lead and key point of contact for apprentices. An organisational Training Needs Analysis is maintained, informed by staff reviews and monthly 121 meetings. This is used by our Senior Assessor to ensure any skills gaps are identified and addressed. We have a staff development budget which allows	of caseloads. Feedback tells us that staff welcome being involved in discussions and the various forums offered to contribute their ideas which is empowering and builds effective working relationships. They feel well supported through the staff appraisal process and appreciate the open-door policy in place. There is ownership of goals and they appreciate the opportunities available for professional development. Following review of our working practices, annual leave entitlement has been equalised for all staff, regardless of length of service.Our awarding body has recognised 'high levels of in-house training' and a 'collegiate approach' and we have been awarded the 'We Invest in People' accreditation. Regarding our subcontractor, we take assurance from their published Fair Work statement – this is a joint agreement		

| | | staff to suggest and source external training which will be of mutual benefit.3.   In line with company policies and procedures, we do not employ Zero Hour Contracts – all team members have an employment contract and job description. 4.   Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace - While we are a small, stable team, we represent a diversity of engineering and administration backgrounds and experiences which is used to benefit apprentices. Within the former framework, the key area of under-representation is gender and we have 2 female assessors who challenge industry stereotypes and act as role models for young female apprentices. Salaries are maintained in line with or exceed industry standards and reviewed annually, being determined by the individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Our team regularly reflects on equality and diversity | with its Trade Union partners confirming their commitment to Fair Work principals and demonstrates the ways in which these are delivered. | | |

		and has recently researched/discussed the use of inclusive language in workplaces. This has supported us to better understand the issues, break down barriers and create environments of mutual respect which can be applied in our practice. 5. Fair Pay for Workers – we are accredited as a Living Wage Employer and committed to maintaining this benefit. 6. Our Flexible and Family Friendly working practices support staff to balance their personal and professional lives. To ensure our policies, procedures and contracts are fair, consistent, and meet the needs of our staff, we engage the services of an external HR company. These practices apply from day one of employment and include hybrid working and flexible working patterns which most of our assessing team utilise. 7. We oppose and do not engage in Fire and Re-hire practices.These			

		principals extend to services delivered by our subcontractor, Glasgow Training College with the Fair Work First criteria forming part of our Service Level Agreement with them.			