

Report of an Inspection of ApprenticeshipsNI 2021
provision in Global Horizon Skills Limited

November 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Global Horizon Skills Limited (GHS) is a private limited company, based in Omagh with offices in Derry/Londonderry, Coleraine and Belfast.

GHS is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 programme (the programme) and is led by two directors. The delivery of the apprenticeships programme is managed by the programme and quality manager, supported by a business development officer and an administrator. One full-time essential skills coordinator and nine associate trainers currently deliver the directed training for the programme, with a bank of a further 32 associate trainers. Most of the apprentices' directed training is delivered online.

At the time of the inspection, 117 apprentices were registered across the professional and technical areas of aviation operations (7), business administration (7), food and drink (1), IT users (3), management (36), pharmacy services (17), providing financial services (25), and team leading (21); 57 at level 2 and 60 at level 3.

The introduction of the all-age apprenticeships in September 2023 widened access to the programme; at the time of the inspection just over three-quarters (77%) of the apprentices were over the age of 25.

Most (76%) of the apprentices entered their programme with four or more GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics; most of the apprentices entered with GCSE English (80%) and mathematics (77%). A minority (11%) entered with no accredited attainment.

All data used for the inspection and presented in this report has been supplied and verified by Global Horizon Skills Limited at the time of the inspection.

B. VIEWS OF APPRENTICES AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to the apprentices and staff in advance of the inspection.

Sixty-eight (58%) of the apprentices responded to the online questionnaire, with just over one-fifth providing written comments (15, 22%). Almost all of them indicated that the online lessons are well taught, assessments are well planned and assessed regularly and they are provided with clear guidance and rules around acceptable and unacceptable behaviours when learning. Most of the written comments were positive; the apprentices highlighted in particular the high levels of support and encouragement they receive from the trainers.

The inspectors also met and spoke with a sample of the apprentices in a number of focus groups in their workplace. The apprentices spoke highly of the support from the trainers. They valued the flexibility and support to integrate the programme with the demands of their work and personal lives. They also spoke about the clear, impartial guidance on the requirements of the assessments and the very prompt and informative feedback on their progress from their trainers who, they reported, were always 'at the end of the phone'.

Most (89%) of the staff completed the online confidential questionnaire, with a small number providing written comments. They all indicated that they are supported well to deliver learning, have good digital skills enabling them to prepare for and deliver online learning effectively and have good access to the internet and ICT equipment while working remotely. All of the staff written comments were positive about the support provided by the management on all aspects of their role, including access to professional learning opportunities.

The inspectors also met and spoke with trainers in a focus group. They all reported they receive excellent support from the senior staff and that they feel empowered and enabled by management with whom there are good channels of communication.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside the organisation to consider how well the organisation:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The organisation's vision is realised well through effective strategic planning and the establishment of a wide range of links and partnerships. These links contribute to the development of a curriculum that is responsive and aligns with the intentions and key objectives of the Department for the Economy's ApprenticeshipsNI programme.
- There are robust tracking and monitoring systems in place at both management and programme level. Regular reviews take place which report on the progress the apprentices are making in their professional and technical programme, in the essential skills, where required, and in the development of their personal and social skills.

- All of the sessions observed were well-planned, made good use of digital technologies and effective questioning to assess learning and there were good levels of engagement and participation by the apprentices.
- Most of the apprentices demonstrate good or better standards of work and are progressing well in the completion of their programme. The trainers have high expectations of the apprentices and set high standards for their work.
- The organisation has effective measures in place to support well the health and well-being of the apprentices. The organisation needs to record more formally the additional support provided to individual apprentices and its impact on their progress in learning.
- The organisation works in partnership to good effect with a social mobility charity and a well-known national bank to provide employment and training opportunities for apprentices from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Almost all of them have completed and achieved their full framework qualification and most of them progressed to employment with the bank.
- A wide range of links and partnerships has been established with employers including large companies, sectoral bodies, business representatives and other stakeholders. These links are improving recruitment and curriculum design and help deliver training that meets the needs of the apprentices and the employers.
- Overall, most (84%) of the apprentices recruited over the three-year period from 2020/21-2022/23 remained on the programme. Of these, all achieved their full qualification framework. At level 2, most (81%) of the apprentices completed and achieved. At level 3, almost all (92%) completed and achieved their qualification. In the essential skills, all the apprentices achieved the level 2 qualification in communication and application of number, even where the framework requires level 1, and all of them achieved their targeted qualification level in ICT.
- The introduction of an end-point grading system for apprentices to recognise the commitment, attendance, level of engagement and standard of their work has resulted in an improvement in the quality of their work.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current guidance.

Areas for action:

- review and re-balance the online and in-person training, in order to provide better opportunities for the apprentices to develop further their communication and interpersonal skills;

- ensure that the trainers who require the Certificate in Teaching qualification complete it within the required timeframe;
- provide more extensive information on potential career progression pathways from the ApprenticeshipsNI programmes; and
- update the procedure flowchart for apprentices to report a concern and share the flowchart with the apprentices, including with new apprentices during induction.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Global Horizon Skills' vision is "To develop an apprenticeship curriculum which reflects and aligns with economic and skills needs in Northern Ireland and through innovative marketing and employer engagement, enables access to all eligible candidates, making a positive and impactful difference to their work and personal lives". This vision is realised through effective strategic planning and a wide range of links and partnerships that contribute to the development of a curriculum that is responsive and aligns with the intentions and key objectives of the Department for the Economy's ApprenticeshipsNI programme. It takes good account of the local skills needs in the contracted areas to include provision such as pharmacy services and aviation services. It is a concern that the aviation services apprenticeship is to be discontinued due to the withdrawal of the qualification by the awarding body. There is no alternative qualification available and there will be no training available for this occupational area.

The strategic planning for the delivery of apprenticeship provision is well informed by the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. The priority areas identified for further development are appropriate and, the associated action planning to bring about the required improvement is supported well by tracking and monitoring of relevant data.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Access to Global Horizon's ApprenticeshipsNI programme across Northern Ireland includes a blended learning academy model of delivery, enabling well apprentices from different companies and/or branches to share learning and professional practice through online lessons and group learning approaches. The combination of face to face and online modes of delivery is used effectively to provide a flexible, bespoke learning programme and this works well for most of the apprentices and employers. A majority of the apprentices have additional time allocated outside of their taught classes to complete assessment work during their working week.

Some of the apprentices who spoke to inspectors in focus groups reported that they found the duration of the training time with their trainers too limited and would have preferred a longer time period for the online sessions as well as some in-person sessions. For these apprentices, across a small number of professional and

technical areas and in the essential skills provision, the balance of online and in-person training needs to be adjusted to ensure that the learning provision is meeting better the apprentices' development needs and provide greater opportunities for them to develop fully their communication and interpersonal skills.

All of the training sessions observed were well-planned, made good use of digital technologies and effective questioning to assess and consolidate the apprentices' learning. Mutually respectful and professional relationships have been developed between the trainers and apprentices resulting in good levels of engagement and participation. The apprentices demonstrate very good understanding of the occupational areas they work in, and they are making appropriate progress in the development of the skills and knowledge required for their work role and future career progression.

The apprentices have regular reviews of their progress in their vocational programme, in the essential skills, where required, and in their transferable skills. The trainers maintain a robust tracking and monitoring system identifying attendance, submission of assessment and progress in each unit. The employers/supervisors report that very good communication is maintained with the organisation. Supervisors are informed of apprentices' progress on a regular basis by the trainer as well as deadline dates for assessment submissions.

Careers advice for the apprentices follows a three-stage approach starting at induction with two further individual careers support sessions during the programme. Ongoing vocationally relevant careers guidance and information for the apprentices is provided by the vocational trainers during the training sessions and is supplemented by the employers' professional development programmes. The apprentices are signposted to careers support resources, and to industry related training and development opportunities. Most of the apprentices spoken to reported that they have not received sufficient information on progression options and pathways to higher education. There is, therefore, a need to for GHS to provide the apprentices with further information on potential progression pathways to higher level education and training programmes.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Most of the apprentices demonstrate good or better standards of work and are progressing well in the completion of their programme. The trainers have high expectations of the apprentices and set high standards for their work. The work observed in their portfolios includes well researched pieces of extended writing incorporating supporting graphics and screen grabs of relevant information. The apprentices are very committed to their training programme and have an appetite for learning and a willingness to receive and respond to constructive feedback in order to improve their work.

The organisation recognises the range of personal and social issues that the apprentices face and has effective measures in place to support well their health and well-being. It provides the apprentices with mental health training as part of their induction process and signposts them to relevant external support organisations. As a consequence, the apprentices feel well supported in their learning and training.

Effective pastoral care is also provided by the trainers. Through good channels of communication, the trainers are aware of the apprentices' personal challenges and difficulties and work to put appropriate mitigations in place, particularly for the level 2 apprentices. The organisation has identified, through its quality improvement planning process, the need to record more formally the additional support provided to individual apprentices in order to evaluate the impact of the support provided, including on the learning outcomes.

The organisation works in partnership with a social mobility charity and a well-known national bank to provide employment and training opportunities for apprentices from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. The programme "Providing Financial Services" has been delivered successfully to over 50 apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds during the last two years. A majority of these apprentices have a recognised disability, health condition or other additional learning need. It is noteworthy that almost all of them have completed their training and achieved all elements of the apprenticeship qualification framework and most continued employment with the bank.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The organisation has introduced an innovative award system. This well-considered system is leading to demonstrate improvement in the quality of the apprentices' written assignments. They undertake more in-depth research and additional independent learning in order to improve the standard of their assignments.

The apprentices progress successfully through the course and have benefitted greatly from participation on the apprenticeship programme. This has led to good opportunities for promotion in their workplaces. Overall, they found the learning and assignment work interesting, challenging, and relevant to their everyday work. Additionally, they have gained important transferable skills such as time-management and confidence.

Overall, outcomes are high, most (84%) of the apprentices recruited over the three-year period from 2020/21-2022/23, completed their training programme and achieved all elements of their apprenticeship qualification framework. On the level 2 programme, most (81%) of the apprentices completed their training and achieved all of their qualifications and, on the level 3 programme almost all (92%) of the apprentices completed and achieved. The outcomes are significantly higher than the level 2 and 3 programmes respective averages for the sector, as published [in the DfE ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin](#), October 2024.

In the essential skills, all the apprentices achieved the level 2 qualification in communication and application of number, even where the framework requires level 1, and all of them achieved their targeted qualification level in ICT.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The management team has developed an inclusive and supportive environment for learning. The managers and training team collaborate and work well together. There are processes in place to standardise the delivery across the providing financial services provision, including the development of a range of resources and in planning the delivery model. The trainers are passionate about their work and feel empowered and enabled by the senior management. The organisation consults with them on developments, asks their opinions and takes on board their suggestions for improvement.

The views of the apprentices on their programme are obtained through an online survey and there is good evidence that the organisation takes due cognisance of the feedback from the apprentices. For example, one company reported that the apprentices who had been out of education for a period of time found the online mode of delivery too difficult. The organisation was flexible in addressing this issue and communicated effectively with the company in order to adapt the approach, resulting in the provision of a more appropriate in-person delivery model. This proved to be more effective in meeting the learning needs of the apprentices, supporting and enabling them to complete their programme successfully while carrying out their job roles.

A wide range of links and partnerships has been established with employers including large companies, sector bodies, business representatives and other stakeholders. These links are improving recruitment to the apprenticeship programme from 44 in 2022/23 to 150 in 2024/25 and are used to good effect to inform the curriculum design and to deliver training that meets the needs of the apprentices and their employers. The qualification units are chosen in consultation with the employers and the delivery models are flexible to meet individual and company requirements.

The inspectors met with and spoke with a sample of employers and their representatives. They report that they have a very good collaborative relationship with the organisation, who are extremely supportive and responsive to their feedback. The organisation works well with the sector bodies and individual employers to devise a programme that meets the industry and employers' needs. The employers report that they are fully briefed on the requirements of the programme and are consulted on the choice of the optional qualification units. The content of the qualifications meets their workforce development needs and that the delivery is flexible and well organised. As a result of the training, the apprentices are more confident and competent in their job role, and their personal and social skills are developed well through participation on the programme.

The Certificate in Teaching qualification has been completed by most (78%) of the trainers, it is important that the remainder undertake the qualification in a timely manner. The essential skills coordinator attends the briefings on the new essential skills curriculum and all the staff ensure that their knowledge of their professional and technical area is up to date.

F. CHILD and ADULT PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current guidance. The ETI will monitor the progress in addressing the following area for action:

- update the procedure flowchart for apprentices to report a concern and ensure this is shared with the apprentices, including with new apprentices at induction.

4. GOING FORWARD

Global Horizon Skills is realising well its vision for an employer-led, innovative and impactful apprenticeship programme, particularly to ensure it is fulfilling the Department's overarching intentions and key objectives for the programme. The strategic planning is well-considered and purposeful in engaging with employers and prospective apprentices to provide training that is aligned well to their respective needs. The staff set realistically high standards which, through good quality learning provision, are achieved with success. The management and staff work collegially and have high expectations of the apprentices. The apprentices' work is of a high standard and outcomes are high.

The inspection has identified an aspect of highly effective practice which should be shared more widely, namely:

- the effective partnership working with a social mobility charity and a national bank to give prospective apprentices from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to engage in employment and training and to progress to 'good jobs'.

ETI will monitor the progress of Global Horizon Skills Limited in addressing the areas for action as laid out in this report.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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