This research aimed to explore factors and outcomes associated with non-completion and completion of Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) in Scotland for those aged 16-24. MAs are built around an appropriate Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) level 3 qualification or above. The aim of the MA programme is to increase the pool of people trained to intermediate level skills. The research sought to explore the following questions.

- What are the factors that create barriers to completion?
- What benefits are lost to employees and employers from non-completion?
- How can the numbers of employees not completing an MA be minimised?
- What improvements could the Enterprise Network make to the quality of MA delivery?
- How can other stakeholders help improve completion rates?

In addition to identifying factors associated with non-completion, the research report recommended a number of changes which could improve completion rates.

**Main Findings**

- Employers have a key role in ensuring successful completion of apprenticeships. An important priority must be to involve many employers more fully in the programme.
- Training providers should have a key role in working with employers and apprentices in implementing a training programme. Their role, however, is often limited and they have focused more on the assessment of vocational qualifications (VQs). Their training role should be clearly specified and monitored.
- Steps are required to ensure that young people are only recruited onto the MA programme when this is appropriate for both their employer and the young people themselves. Both the young people and their employers must be made fully aware of the opportunities and responsibilities involved.
- There was evidence of widespread differences in the nature and extent of training provided within MA frameworks. There is a need to consider the ways in which acceptable standards of consistency with regard to the type of training can be established.
- There is evidence that the MA frameworks could be improved in various ways. It has been suggested above that the frameworks might specify more clearly what is required regarding recruitment, induction and training for each MA.
- The quality assurance and contracts management systems have been recognised as having key roles in ensuring that the quality of the training provided is acceptable. Scottish Enterprise Network should be supported in changes that they are introducing, to ensure that a more rigorous, but supportive, QA system is put in place and is fully implemented.
- Existing databases do not provide full and adequate data on the progression of young people enrolled on MA programmes. The Enterprise Network should be requested to establish more effective arrangements and guidelines for data gathering.
- It has been suggested by a range of stakeholders that the current policy focuses too strongly on the issue of targets that specify number of starts on the programme, and not enough on the quality of training which young people receive. In order to achieve higher completion rates, the targets should be reviewed to place greater emphasis on the quality of training and outputs from the programme.
About Modern Apprenticeships

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) have been available in Scotland since 1994. The aim of the MA programme is to increase the pool of people trained to intermediate level skills. MAs were originally for young adults (aged 16-24), but the upper age limit has now been removed. All apprentices are expected to have employed status. MAs are built around an appropriate Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) level 3 qualification or above. The other elements are a mixture of sector relevant SVQs/NVQs and core skills. The content of the MA is described as a ‘framework’. Frameworks are developed by the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC) or other sector skills body where a SSC does not yet exist. There are in the region of 75 different frameworks available, each relating to a different occupational sector. Such a range indicates the move to adopt this model in sectors not traditionally associated with apprenticeship. Frameworks for such sectors have been described as ‘non-traditional’, and those in sectors in which apprenticeship has a long history are described as ‘traditional’. The expected length of time needed to completed an MA varies widely between frameworks.

The Scottish Executive sets targets in relation to the number of apprentices in training. According to figures supplied by Scottish Enterprise Network and Highlands and Islands Enterprise at the end of March 2003, there were over 25,000 apprentices in training registered in Scottish Enterprise Network and over 1500 in Highlands and Islands Enterprise. At national policy level, the role of MAs in increasing competitiveness in the Scottish economy is seen as key, through meeting the need for intermediate level skills. Recently there has been significant growth in the number of young people (and more recently those over 25) registering for a MA and the growth of the programme continues to be supported. The Scottish Executive, in its Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland (2003), stated that more funds would be available to increase the number of MAs.

The research

Whilst support for increased numbers starting MAs is strong, this research aimed to understand what happens after the point of registration, including how many do not complete, the factors associated with both completion and non-completion and what can be lost due to non-completion or gained despite non-completion. The research deployed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analysis was based on datasets provided by Scottish Enterprise Network, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews with key staff from the major agencies involved in implementing the MA programme, training providers, employers and young people.

In Scottish Enterprise Network, there was major growth in the numbers of young people starting MAs between the years 2000-01 and 2001-02, from 9,392 to 16,406 starts (an increase of 74%), with a consolidation in the number of new starts since. In Highlands and Islands Enterprise the period of significant growth was between 2001-02 and 2002-03, from 642 to 1685 starts (an increase of 162%). Completion rates in Scottish Enterprise Network over this period remained relatively stable despite the large increase in starts. Comparison of completion rates between programmes indicate the complexity of the pattern across the MA programme. Despite a difference in history of apprenticeship and training between ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ frameworks, there is no evidence in the data that this is producing major differences in completion. In both Scottish Enterprise Network and Highlands and Islands Enterprise traditional gender recruitment patterns in sectors such as construction and motor vehicles are maintained.

The research indicated that the factors associated with non-completion and completion are complex. A supportive workplace context emerged as a key factor in completion from all of the interview datasets. This included committed employers, time being made available, a culture in which training is valued, and peer support. Wider sectoral issues, such as the stability of employment and the level of wages, were also important issues. The quality of the training is crucial to whether or not apprentices complete. The responsibility of ensuring good quality training falls on both the employer, who should ensure that opportunities to undertake the required type and level of work are available, and the training provider. Although there was evidence that in many cases training providers had provided support which had been vital in the apprentice completing, a significant issue relates to the many cases where just the assessment of competencies, rather than a training process, is taking place. The existing quality assurance procedures did not appear to be adequately monitoring the training processes. Also emergent were issues associated with the appropriateness of an apprenticeship model which has been imported from the ‘traditional’ sector into new areas, particularly in relation to the type of training and how it is delivered. This raises important questions about what kinds of training are needed for the satisfactory completion of an apprenticeship. Other key factors include recruitment, induction, and the extent to which involvement in the MA is an informed choice on the part of both apprentices and employers. Factors in the personal life of the apprentice were rarely the primary reason for non-completion, but could interact with other factors.
Implications and recommendations

Given the evidence that employers have a key role in ensuring successful completion of apprenticeships, but that employer engagement varied greatly, an important priority is how to engage them more fully in the programme. It is therefore suggested that the Enterprise Network and the sector skills bodies should be requested to work together to engage employers more effectively in the programme.

There is also a need for training providers to work more closely with employers to plan and implement training programmes. If this issue is addressed more effectively, it could have a major impact in improving the quality of training for many young people and reducing non-completion rates. The Enterprise Network can have an important role in establishing what is required of training providers, while this can be monitored through an enhanced quality assurance and contracts management systems.

The recruitment process needs to be reviewed. An important priority should be to establish clear requirements regarding the processes for recruitment and induction to each MA programme which will involve both employers and training providers. The nature and extent of training within individual frameworks also need to be reviewed: a process which could involve the Modern Apprenticeships Implementation Group (MAIG). The MAIG should also take an active role in regularly reviewing framework requirements, in co-operation with employers.

Information about MAs needs to be more widely disseminated, and Careers Scotland could be involved in this. More effective arrangements need to be put in place for gathering data through the Enterprise Network.

Finally, the Scottish Executive should review the targets set to underpin a high quality work-based MA training system, and place greater emphasis on quality and outputs, rather than starts.

About the Research

The research was undertaken during 2003 by a research team comprising staff from the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning and the Scottish Centre for Work Based Learning, both based at Glasgow Caledonian University. Data from a number of sources were used in the research.

The report analysed statistical data in order to provide information on uptake and growth of the MA programme, completion and non-completion rates, the social and demographic characteristics of apprentices, and the time spent on the programme by completers and non-completers. Existing Scottish Enterprise Network, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Qualifications Authority data were used. More detailed analysis was undertaken for a sample of 6 frameworks - Business Administration, Construction, Customer Service, Hospitality, Motor Vehicles and Retail Distribution and three Scottish Enterprise Network Local Enterprise Companies (Glasgow, Forth Valley and Grampian), as well as the whole of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This provided a varied geographical and economic base for the study.

Qualitative data were produced through interviews with representatives from the majority of the stakeholder groups involved in MAs at the levels of provision and policy. Interviews were undertaken with the following groups (numbers of interviews in brackets).

- The Enterprise Network, Local Enterprise Companies, and Careers Scotland (11)
- Sector skills bodies (6)
- Training providers (29)
- Employing organisations (21)
- Young people (60), 25 completers and 35 non-completers.

The broad range of respondents included in the research enabled triangulation of data, which strengthened the conclusions which were drawn.
If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about social research, please contact us at:

Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department
3rd Floor
Meridian Court
3 Cadogan Street
GLASGOW G2 6AT
Tel: 0141 242-0264
Fax: 0141 242-5455
Email: socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

If you wish a copy of “Modern Apprenticeships: Improving Completion Rates” the research report which is summarised in this research findings, please send a cheque for £5.00 made payable to:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh
EH3 9AZ
Tel: 0870 606 5566
Fax: 0870 606 5588
http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

This document (and other Research Findings and Reports) and information about social research in the Scottish Executive may be viewed on the Internet at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

The site carries up-to-date information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Executive. Subjects covered include transport, housing, social inclusion, rural affairs, children and young people, education, social work, community care, local government, civil justice, crime and criminal justice, regeneration, planning and women's issues. The site also allows access to information about the Scottish Household Survey.