

Babcock International group

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Babcock International Group (Babcock) is the largest independent learning provider in the United Kingdom, delivering work-based learning programmes in six subject areas to over 20,000 learners nationwide and working with over 6,000 employers. Babcock provides training across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and employs over 900 staff.

Babcock acquired VT Group in July 2010 which included VT Training, inspected 20 July 2009 and judged to have good overall effectiveness, and VT Flagship, inspected 1 October 2010 and judged to have outstanding overall effectiveness. Babcock was visited as part of the Ofsted survey for good practice in motor vehicle apprenticeship training in January 2010 and the survey on numeracy skills in August 2010. The change in leadership and slow improvements in overall apprenticeship success rates promoted a focused monitoring visit. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Babcock made in its self-assessment and quality improvement planning to drive improvements since the last inspections?	Significant progress
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Since the last inspections, there have been significant improvements in several areas relating to self-assessment and quality improvement. The quality management team was strengthened by the appointment of two new managers to oversee the work in engineering and the services sectors. Monitoring of learners' progress is much improved and is conducted both centrally and regionally by managers. Management information systems introduced provide accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date information to all staff about learners' progress. Data are used well to manage effectively the work of assessors and their learners.

Systematic quality assurance has been further developed. Business improvement reviews, the basis on which the system is built, are now being undertaken regionally to help to ensure that all staff can contribute effectively to self-assessment and quality improvements. Learners' and employers' views are collected frequently, analysed and acted upon quickly. The very positive views of the company's work were confirmed by inspectors through the Ofsted survey prior to this visit. Babcock has further developed its close and productive relationships with employers, improving the training programmes by making sure they match the employers' and learners' needs more closely. In a small number of self-assessment reports, the areas for improvement provide insufficient detail about how improvements will be brought about.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Babcock made in ensuring that it effectively maintains the very high success rates with employers that formed part of VT Flagship (Babcock)?

Significant progress

The two key employers who currently make up the VT Flagship contract have maintained their high qualification success rates. Success rates for BMW learners and the first cohort of EDF Energy learners are both 94%. Where the overall apprenticeship success rates show a decline of 12 percentage points in 2010/11 this was due to one cohort of Network Rail learners who transferred to Network Rail's own contract using an incorrect leaving code. These learners show as leavers rather than transfers, resulting in a lower than expected success rate in 2010/11. Babcock continues to work closely with employers to improve completion rates within the timeframes expected.

What progress has been made in improving the qualification success rates for apprentices?

Reasonable progress

Overall qualification success rates have remained relatively static for the last two years at around eight percentage points below the national averages. However, learners on advanced apprenticeships in hospitality, the largest subject area, showed an improvement of almost 10 percentage points in 2010/11. This improvement was as a result of ensuring learners have sufficient opportunity to competently and confidently perform relevant work-related jobs and tasks before they progress from level 2 to level 3. Success rates for intermediate apprenticeships remain just below the hospitality national average, with significant variations existing between employers.

In engineering, success rates have been very low for the last three years. Much of this was due to a large group of Ministry of Defence learners who transferred to the Ministry's main contract and were shown as non completers. Recent improvements to the recruitment and selection processes and the development of a new training centre are impacting positively on the progress of advanced apprentices.

Managers make good use of the wide range of data now available to focus on improving success rates. Data are presented in a useful format that clearly shows trends over time and variations in performance across all sectors, regions and different groups of learners, employers and assessors.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in health and social care?

Significant progress

Significant improvements in the health and social care area have been well managed since the last inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. Extensive training for assessors has helped them to improve their approaches to initial assessment of

learners' skills and experience at the start their programmes. Based on these assessments, individual training programmes are better designed to build on learners' strengths and workplace experiences. This has helped learners to gain in confidence and make better initial progress than at the last inspection. Assessors continue to be supported to develop this work through national workshops and a good range of web-based seminars to support care learners and assessors.

Babcock has undertaken further development of the easily accessible web-based resources which support health and social care learners. Overall success rates in health and social care have improved, with advanced apprenticeship success rates rising significantly in 2010/11. Intermediate apprenticeship success rates have also improved by eight percentage points since the last inspection. However improvements across regions are inconsistent.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in business, administration and law?

Reasonable progress

Babcock is well aware of the challenges within the subject area of business, administration and law which was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Problems with the delivery of the technical certificate in team leading and management qualifications were identified. Working with the Institute for Leadership and Management, Babcock has developed resources and given assessors additional training on how to deliver the qualifications. Assessors are now more careful of starting learners on appropriate qualifications; ensuring learners' job roles will allow them to cover the full requirements of the qualifications. Success rates have improved for both intermediate and advanced apprentices and are now in line with national averages.

What progress has been made in ensuring effective delivery of literacy and numeracy?

Significant progress

Provision for literacy and numeracy was judged to be good at the last inspection and has seen significant improvements since then. A strong focus on improving this aspect of the Babcock's work has benefited learners well. Success rates on key skills qualifications show steady improvement and are now high for application of number and communications at levels 1 and 2. Assessors receive very effective support to help them improve their teaching in key skills from a team of five skills trainers who work across the company. This team has developed specific elements within the 'preparing to teach course' taken by all assessors, to support key skills delivery and help learners to pass their assessments at the first attempt.

The team undertakes lesson observations of literacy and numeracy sessions. Their observation reports focus well on how much learning is taking place. The team makes good suggestions to assessors as to how they can make their sessions more effective. The company now has a good range of resources available on its virtual learning environment to support both assessors and learners in their development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made by the new leadership team in managing the transition from VT Group to Babcock International Group? Significant progress

The transition from VT Group to Babcock International Group was particularly well managed. The planning and implementation of these plans ensured that employers, learners and staff were well informed about the new company and there were no interruptions to business or learning. The overnight rebranding was most welcomed by staff and supported effective communications and cultural change very well. Many of the staff who worked for VT Group have successfully transferred to Babcock, providing a high level of continuity for learners and employers. Staff have better access to support from specialist tutors and trainers. Communications between managers and staff are effective. Employers appreciate the professional and well-managed approach taken during the acquisition period and feel they are able to access a broader range of provision.

Babcock places great emphasis on safe working practices, safeguarding, equality and diversity. This strong focus across the new parts of the group is having a positive effect on learners and those who work in the training environment. The company has recently been reassessed for Investor in People and has achieved gold standard in this assessment.

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