

VT Flagship (Babcock)

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51859

Name of lead inspector: Richard Moore HMI

Last day of inspection: 1 October 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. VT Flagship (Babcock) is part of the Babcock International Group (Babcock), which is a public limited company specialising in the supply of engineering support services to many sectors. Babcock took over the VT Group in July 2010, including the division formerly known as VT Training, which incorporated VT Flagship. The company delivers a wide range of training to over 20,000 learners a year, including 237 apprentices at the time of the inspection. Ofsted inspected VT Training in July 2009, but the inspection did not include the contracts held at the time by VT Flagship.
2. VT Flagship (Babcock) delivers engineering and automotive training at two sites in south east England. They are the VT Flagship Engineering Academy (EDF Energy) at HMS Sultan in Gosport, a large training establishment within a naval base operated by the Royal Navy, and the purpose-built BMW Academy based at Wokefield Park, near Reading. Both sites operated under separate Learning and Skills Council contracts until January 2009. Ofsted inspected BMW (UK) Ltd (BMW) in February 2008, at which time it judged the provision outstanding. The Skills Funding Agency now funds VT Flagship (Babcock) to deliver apprenticeships for BMW and EDF Energy.
3. Learners from EDF start with a two-year, full-time skills training scheme. At the time of the inspection there were 105 apprentices. At the end of the first year, learners return to the workplace for eight weeks where EDF places them into different engineering disciplines. They then complete the second year and part of their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 before spending a third year in the workplace where they complete the advanced apprenticeship.
4. BMW has a dealer network of approximately 150 franchised dealerships that sell and repair BMW group vehicles. At the time of the inspection, there were 132 learners on a range of vehicle maintenance and repair and parts operations programmes. The learners carry out training at the academy, which also has residential accommodation in an adjoining hotel. Recruiting dealers employ the apprentices and mentor them in the dealerships.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	56 apprentices 203 advanced apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
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Capacity to improve	Grade 1
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	1

Overall effectiveness

- VT Flagship (Babcock) provides outstanding provision for learners working in general engineering and motor vehicle engineering. Success rates are very high for all learners and have shown sustained and significant improvements over the last two years. Learners make excellent progress towards achieving a very wide range of extremely relevant core and additional qualifications. They enjoy their training tremendously and develop excellent technical and personal skills. Standards of health and safety are outstanding. Training is very good overall and is outstanding at the BMW Academy in particular. Theory classes for EDF learners are only satisfactory. Learners benefit from excellent resources during their training and very good residential accommodation and facilities while staying away from home. Assessment practices are very good and ensure that learners have their progress monitored on a very regular basis. Employers value highly the broad range of skills that learners develop and the involvement they have in contributing to, and developing, the training. Learners benefit tremendously from the exciting and very rewarding overseas visits and other enrichment activities. Induction for new learners is a particularly memorable experience. Partnerships with employers are extremely productive and employers feel very well informed about their employees' progress. Staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support and have a very genuine concern for their learners. VT Flagship (Babcock) has a very strong commitment to the apprenticeship programmes and has invested very heavily in staff

expertise, learning resources and other facilities. Managers monitor key performance indicators very carefully. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and are very appropriate for young adults who are away from both home and the workplace for long periods of time. Equality of opportunity is good. Capacity to improve is outstanding. VT Flagship (Babcock) has a sustainable track record of excellent performance. Three consecutive inspections have now judged the training at the BMW Academy to be outstanding.

Main findings

- Success rates are outstanding and have been significantly above national averages for the last two years. Almost every learner who left in 2009/10 completed their apprenticeship successfully, together with a wide range of other very useful qualifications. Retention rates are very high. Learners enjoy their training tremendously and value highly the range of excellent leisure facilities and activities available to them.
- Learners make very good progress and achieve high standards of work. Success rates within the planned completion time are very high. All learners achieve a number of different qualifications in the first year of their apprenticeship, which is highly motivating. They have an excellent knowledge of their programme and achieve very high grades for their assessed written work.
- Learners develop excellent technical and personal skills. As well as developing specialist skills required by their employers, learners acquire a wide range of high quality general engineering skills and knowledge. Learners have a very mature attitude towards their training. They are self confident and have very good analytical and independent thinking skills. Learners respond very well to challenging questions from their peers and teamwork is excellent.
- Learners feel extremely safe, both in the workplace where they adopt excellent safe working practices and when they are away from home attending the training academies and staying in residential accommodation. They are extremely knowledgeable about their own health and well-being and take part in many sporting and other recreational activities.
- Teaching and learning are very good. The training at the BMW Academy is outstanding. Tutors use the exceptional resources to deliver high standards of training. Practical training is good for EDF learners with plentiful and excellent facilities, but theory teaching is only satisfactory. Most quality improvement activities are highly effective, but the observation of teaching and learning process at the VT Flagship Engineering Academy (EDF Energy) does not contribute sufficiently to formal appraisals of tutors' performance. There is too little sharing of best practice in teaching with the tutors at the BMW academy.
- Assessment practices are very good. The thorough initial assessment arrangements ensure staff identify learners' literacy and numeracy requirements accurately, but very few require support for any additional learning needs. Assessments in the workplace are frequent and flexible to suit learners' and employers' needs. Reviews of learners' progress are very effective in identifying how learners can improve their performance. The range of

evidence in some learners' portfolios does not accurately reflect the high levels of skills and knowledge learners gain.

- Training is very flexible and responsive to employers' changing technology and working practices. Learners develop a very broad base of skills and knowledge. They benefit tremendously from a lot of very purposeful and high quality enrichment activities. The standards of accommodation and recreational and dining facilities are very high at both academies.
- Staff go to considerable lengths to provide excellent support for learners who spend a long time away from home at the two academies. Recruitment processes are very thorough. Induction is imaginative and memorable for all learners. Learners make use of a wide range of very good services in respect of their personal care and support.
- VT Flagship (Babcock) has a very clear and well articulated strategic vision supported by clear priorities, targets and timescales. Recent mergers and acquisitions have strengthened the management expertise and increased the levels of investment in the training programmes. Management meetings focus strongly on key performance indicators relating to learners and on strategic developments. Managers make very good use of internal and external data to make key strategic and operational decisions.
- VT Flagship (Babcock) pays very close attention to safety in the workplace and at the academy and has extremely rigorous procedures in place to ensure learners' well-being while staying in the residential accommodation at both sites. There are very good communications between residential care staff and those employees responsible for training to make both parties aware of any issues learners have and to monitor attendance very closely.
- Learners have a very good understanding of matters relating to equality and standards of respect and conduct are high. Learners are able to speak out with confidence about any concerns they may have. Staff pay a great deal of attention to what learners have to say and value their opinions highly. The reinforcement of equality is insufficient in a small number of progress reviews. The provider has not yet developed fully-effective strategies to recruit more women to the programmes.
- VT Flagship (Babcock) has implemented highly effective actions each year to improve the programme based on learners' feedback. As a result, learners have very few complaints about the training or the residential facilities. Elected learner representatives chair a number of different groups which meet to feed back learners' views on all aspects of training.

What does VT Flagship (Babcock) need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of theory classes for EDF learners through more formal integration of observations of teaching and learning with staff appraisal and better sharing of good practice with tutors at BMW.

- Increase the variety of assessment practices at BMW to gather a greater range of evidence which accurately reflects the skills and knowledge gained by the learners.
- Develop detailed strategies that set challenging targets for both employers to recruit more women into the training programmes at the two academies.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the very good residential accommodation and leisure facilities
- the respect they receive and the way in which they are treated as adults
- the excellent personal care and support they receive
- being away from home
- the high standards of training
- the very good health, welfare and sex education
- being in employment
- the teamwork and forming of good relationships with colleagues
- the excellent training resources
- the exciting and very rewarding overseas visits.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the length of time the EDF learners have to queue for their lunch
- the amount of practical work the EDF learners do in the second year of their training.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very flexible and responsive training provision
- the amount of added value the learners receive through their training
- the professionalism of the provider
- the broad range of skills that learners develop
- the support provided by staff at both academies
- the excellent communications and the way in which they are kept informed of developments and learners' progress
- the well structured training programme
- the highly qualified and very well motivated staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- none identified.

Main inspection report**Capacity to make and sustain improvement****Grade 1**

6. VT Flagship's (Babcock) capacity to make and sustain improvement is outstanding. The provider has a consistent track record of significant and sustainable improvements in performance. Success rates have been very high for the last two years. The learners and employers discern year-on-year improvements to the provision, based on the highly effective ways in which the provider gathers and acts upon their views. All managers have a very strong customer focus and are very flexible and responsive to the demands that employers and apprentices make upon them. Employers are fully involved in the programme and have a strong commitment to future partnerships and work on new products and technologies. The employers themselves have an excellent reputation as leading brand names in their area of engineering. The management of recent mergers and acquisitions involving VT Flagship (Babcock) has been very good. This has strengthened the already high levels of investment in training and expertise of the staff involved. The management team is very experienced and committed in seeking to secure and achieve sustained improvements. It is knowledgeable and passionate about the benefits of work-based learning.
7. The self-assessment process is outstanding. VT Flagship (Babcock) involves learners and employers fully in the process and integrates self-assessment with its own business improvement systems and the mock inspections it carries out. The most recent self-assessment report for 2009/10 is clear and comprehensive, bringing together an analysis of the two previously separate providers very effectively to produce a set of coherent overall judgements. It reflects the Ofsted inspection methodology and framework very accurately. Inspectors' grades and judgements matched almost all of those in the self-assessment report. Managers monitor the detailed quality improvement plan regularly and update it to reflect actions carried out and any changes in targets or timescales.

Outcomes for learners**Grade 1**

8. Overall success rates are very high and significantly above national averages for the last two years. They have shown a rapidly improving trend and there is very little variation in the very high levels of performance between both academies. In 2009/10 to date, the overall success rate is almost 100%. At the same time, learners achieve a very wide range of other academic, job-related and life skills qualifications from which they benefit tremendously. They enjoy their learning very much and value highly the extra-curricular leisure facilities and activities they can use at both sites. There are too few learners from minority ethnic

groups and too few women in training to make a meaningful judgement on possible differences in success rates for different groups of learners.

9. Learners make very good progress and achieve high standards of work. Success rates within the planned completion time are very high and more than 30% above the national average. Learners achieve many of their qualifications in the first year of the programmes which motivates them highly to attain increasingly challenging targets later in their training. Assessed work is of a very high standard as evidenced by the number of distinction grades learners receive for their written assignments. They have an excellent knowledge of the programme and what their tutors expect of them. VT Flagship (Babcock) devotes a lot of time to celebrating learners' success, both academically and in offsite activities, with a range of imaginative awards.
10. Learners develop excellent technical and personal skills. They work alongside highly skilled mentors who enable the learners to translate the knowledge and practices gained at the academies into excellent working practices. They acquire a very good range of general engineering skills in addition to those required specifically for job roles with their employers. Learners gain a very impressive range of personal skills from their training and from being away from home. They are mature, self-confident, and considerate of others and show great respect to their peers and staff. Teamwork is excellent.
11. Learners feel extremely safe, both in the workplace where standards of health and safety are very high and away from home in the academies and in the residential accommodation available at both sites. Arrangements to ensure both adult learners and those aged 16 to 18 are safe whilst also allowing them time to enjoy a fulfilling social life are very appropriate. They are extremely well informed about healthy lifestyles and well-being and encouraged to take part in a wide range of sporting and other recreational activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

12. Teaching and learning are very good overall. At the BMW Academy, where the training is outstanding, learners take part in highly structured and extremely well planned classes, which they find very challenging. Teaching and learning resources are of an exceptionally high standard at both academies. Practical training is good for EDF learners, but theory classes are only satisfactory. The pace of learning is not appropriate for all learners. Activities to improve the quality of teaching and learning are very effective at BMW, but observations of classes at the VT Flagship Engineering Academy (EDF Energy) do not contribute sufficiently to formal appraisals of tutors' performance. There is not enough sharing of best practice with staff at the BMW Academy.
13. Assessment practices are very good. Initial assessment arrangements are very thorough and help staff at both academies to group learners of similar abilities, although few have any additional learning needs. Workplace assessment is flexible to meet learners' and employers' needs. At BMW, each learner has a personal mentor/assessor with whom they have very regular contact. Staff use

the regular progress reviews to update learners' targets, amend their individual learning plans and to discuss any issues or feedback in detail with them. The assessment practices used at BMW do not always result in a range of evidence that accurately reflect the skills and knowledge gained by learners.

14. The programmes very effectively meet employers' specialist needs as well as developing excellent general engineering and personal skills for the learners. The outstanding enrichment activities widen learners' experiences and have a very significant effect in developing their excellent team working skills. Learners participate in a stimulating and imaginative range of recreational activities while staying away from home. The accommodation and dining facilities are excellent.
15. The very thorough recruitment processes ensure that learners who join the programmes have the right skills to succeed. Induction is a memorable experience for all learners and includes a wide range of imaginative and very effective activities. Staff spend considerable amounts of time supporting learners individually and in groups. They develop very close working relationships that learners value highly. Communications between staff responsible for learners' accommodation and tutors are excellent and result in very close monitoring of their welfare.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

16. VT Flagship (Babcock) has a very clear and well articulated strategic vision. Clear priorities, targets and timescales are set for all aspects of the training programmes. Managers and employer representatives focus in detail on both strategic and operational matters in meetings and use a range of data very effectively to monitor many different aspects of performance. A number of senior managers have been apprentices and/or are very experienced in delivering successful work-based training. The provider has clear strategies for its future development and recent mergers and acquisitions have strengthened investment in the apprenticeship programme. Staff benefit from a range of very good continuing professional development, but some employees do not have a formal appraisal of their performance.
17. Health and safety standards in both academies are excellent and staff have implemented a range of rigorous, but very appropriate, procedures to safeguard learners away from home in residential accommodation. The monitoring of attendance is extremely thorough and attendance rates are very high. Learners' exemplary behaviour reflects the emphasis staff place on respect and discipline. Safeguarding is a key theme at all management meetings. A safeguarding forum representing both academies meets to share good practice and to review policies and procedures. It is company policy to vet all training staff, even though this is not necessary. They are expert in recognising signs in learners who have sensitive issues that they may be reluctant to discuss and how to deal with such instances.

18. Comprehensive equality and diversity policies and highly visible procedures help learners to understand fully the implications of their behaviour. Progress reviews reinforce this understanding further for most learners. The involvement of women in the programmes is very evident in the displays and promotional materials at both academies. They have separate residential accommodation and other facilities when away from home. Overseas trips help to broaden learners' understanding of other cultures. The management steering group has started to monitor key performance indicators to assess the promotion of equality of opportunity but has not yet fully developed strategies or targets that really challenge the two employers to examine their recruitment practices for under-represented groups. Staff receive a lot of very useful equality and diversity training and are very proficient in understanding how to treat different groups of learners.
19. Engagement with users to support improvement is outstanding. VT Flagship (Babcock) gathers learners' views in a wide variety of informal and formal ways and takes their feedback very seriously. Elected learner representatives chair a number of different student committees which meet to review all aspects of the training and to suggest improvements.

Information about the inspection

20. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's national quality manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection reports, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
21. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
VT Flagship (Babcock)
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	237	237
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	1	1
Capacity to improve	1	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1	
How well do learners progress?	1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	1	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	1	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	-	
Quality of provision	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1	
Leadership and management	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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