

Inspection of Babcock Skills Development and Training Limited

Inspection dates: 23–26 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Babcock Skills Development and Training Limited (BSDT) is part of Babcock Engineering and Training Services. Both are owned by Babcock International Group. BSDT's main office is located in Bristol. It provides apprenticeships predominantly for the BMW automotive group. Its apprentices work in BMW dealerships throughout England. Two contracts, with Southern Water and EDF Energy, are winding down. They currently involve only nine and two apprentices respectively.

BSDT staff run the BMW Academy (the Academy), a purpose-built, residential training centre based at Wokefield Park near Reading. BSDT apprentices attend the Academy for week-long block-release training approximately every 85 days. During the inspection, a total of 495 apprentices were in learning, almost all of them on level 3 programmes lasting three years. Of these, 384 were following the light vehicle service and maintenance technician standard at level 3. Thirty-four were following the vehicle body-paint technician standard, also at level 3. Thirty-six were following the one-year customer service practitioner standard at level 2. The remaining apprentices were either following the motorcycle technician repair and maintenance standard or the vehicle damage paint/repair standards apprenticeships, each at level 3. Just over half of apprentices are 16 to 18 years of age. Towards the end of their apprenticeship, apprentices on motor-vehicle related programmes gain a level 2 qualification certifying their competence to work on electric and hybrid vehicles.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices feel valued and safe during their on-the-job training in BMW dealer workshops and off-the-job training at the Academy. They feel privileged to have access to exceptionally good resources for on- and off-the-job training. As a result, apprentices regard their apprenticeship highly and most feel that it is an honour to have been accepted onto the programme. Their behaviour is excellent.

Apprentices learn how to work as a team from the start of their programme. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, all new starters spent a week at the National Outdoors Centre in Wales where they bonded closely with others in their cohort. Leaders plan to restart this initiative, depending on COVID-19 restrictions. More recently, apprentices who stay onsite at the Academy during training, experience useful additional team-building sessions, such as outdoor sports and competitive activities.

Tutors plan learning well. They use a variety of teaching strategies thoughtfully which allows each apprentice to develop the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be effective at work. Almost all employers provide comprehensive support and relevant work opportunities for their apprentices throughout their programme. BMW workplace mentors provide apprentices with good, individualised coaching, advice and training in the workshops. Apprentices make substantial positive contributions to their employers' businesses.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

BSDT's leaders have developed and implemented tailored, ambitious and highly effective light motor-vehicle curriculums for apprentices in very close collaboration with BMW. The apprentices are employed in very well-equipped workshops in BMW main dealerships throughout England. BMW and BSDT staff continually monitor, review and where necessary update these curriculums to reflect the latest industry trends and practice. Most recently this includes the repair and maintenance of hybrid and electric vehicles. Leaders, with BMW, have ensured that the customer service practitioner curriculum is aligned closely to BMW's needs by including technical, BMW-specific, motor-vehicle related units.

The motor-vehicle curriculums are carefully structured and well planned. They embody and inculcate the brand values and high-technical standards required by BMW. This ensures that apprentices can become the highly trained, confident and technically skilled staff that BMW requires in each of its dealers' workshops.

Employers support apprentices well to progress to more senior workshop roles, such as master technician. Many apprentices are given increased responsibility and become mentors for new apprentices. Managers clearly identify the commercial benefits all of their apprentices bring to their businesses.

Leaders have ensured that apprentices have access to excellent resources for week-long block-release sessions at the Academy. Resources include the most up-to-date

diagnostic and testing equipment together with large workshops and a wide range of current BMW vehicles, including electric and hybrid vehicles. The Academy's trainers are well-qualified, highly knowledgeable and very experienced in the motor-vehicle sector. They share their expertise with apprentices well to ensure that apprentices learn theory and gain practice in depth. Trainers structure training carefully to build apprentices' knowledge and skills progressively. Trainers receive useful mandatory training annually to maintain their knowledge of current BMW vehicles, workshop technologies and innovations.

Leaders have put in place an effective online learning system so that apprentices can start building their basic knowledge before their practical sessions at the Academy. Apprentices who use it value the head start it gives them in learning. However, not all apprentices routinely use the online learning system. Leaders have not been successful in encouraging greater use of the system meaning some apprentices make less progress than others.

Apprentices complete an assessment of their skills at the beginning of each block of training and at the end. As a result, they and their employers understand clearly how well they are developing their skills and knowledge during their off-the-job training and which areas they need to improve.

Apprentices benefit from the guidance and direction of a trained BMW workplace mentor for their on-the-job training. Most mentors work very closely with BSDT's team of career programme advisors (CPA) to ensure that apprentices' on- and off-the-job learning is coordinated well and apprentices make good progress.

Customer service trainers set apprentices high standards and demanding tasks. These apprentices gain detailed knowledge and remember what they have learned. For example, many apprentices recall learning how to manage interactions with clients effectively. They have subsequently used this knowledge well in their practical dealings with customers. Apprentices who need to follow functional skills English and mathematics programmes as part of their apprenticeship are not all able to identify the practical value of the new knowledge they have learned.

Apprentices demonstrate extremely positive attitudes to their learning and take pride in their work. They are keen to develop new skills and make progress in their careers. Apprentices are very well behaved and well turned-out at work and the Academy. They are attentive and pay close attention to their Academy trainers, in order to gain the maximum benefit from their time there. Workplace mentors set high standards for apprentices' good punctuality and attendance. As a result, apprentices prioritise these essential employment skills.

Almost all apprentices report significant gains in their confidence, self-esteem, communications, teamwork and problem-solving skills. They recognise how these skills have improved their performance in the workplace and their personal lives.

Apprentices feel safe. They develop a good understanding of the importance of being respectful of others and acting responsibly. They gain a sound knowledge of

safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values during induction and subsequent learning sessions. Apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities benefit from a calm and professional working environment. As a result, they focus and engage with learning very positively. One apprentice on the autism spectrum has been provided with a 'safe space' in his workplace which allows him to self-regulate and stay focused at work.

Apprentices on the light-vehicle programme demonstrate a good understanding of healthy relationships and what an abusive relationship may look like. As a group, during block training, they discuss topics such as sexual harassment. They are able to recognise signs of an abusive relationship.

Governance is conducted efficiently within Babcock's corporate structures. There is no separate independent board. Senior leaders monitor a series of key performance indicators regularly which provides them with clear oversight of the quality of BSDT's performance. They are usually quick to identify and fix aspects of concern but are not aware of all areas for improvement identified at inspection. Staff make use of a comprehensive online 'dashboard' which provides detailed data on apprentices' performance each week. The dashboard includes clear action points for supporting individual apprentices which staff use well to maintain apprentices' progress.

Around one in five BSDT apprentices have gone past the dates when they were due to complete their apprenticeships. This is because of long gaps in their training caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. BSDT leaders are implementing an effective catch-up strategy for these apprentices including closer and more frequent support from CPAs to accelerate apprentices' completion. However, this has resulted in some apprentices who have not passed their intended completion dates receiving less contact and communication. A very few trainees have not had good links between their on- and off-the-job training. A small number of others have not been able to gain experience of relevant workshop tasks to deepen their practical knowledge following block release training. Leaders and managers have not focused sufficient effort on tackling such concerns.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that all apprentices receive sufficient information on the options that will be available to them after their apprenticeship is complete. Most apprentices are fully aware of their career prospects within the BMW dealership network and aspire to become qualified and highly trained technicians. However, they are not being informed about their wider career choices outside of BMW.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All BSDT staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in keeping apprentices safe. Checks during recruitment ensure newly appointed staff are suitable to work with young people.

BSDT's Academy-based safeguarding team works closely with a wide range of external agencies. This helps them stay well informed about local or regional safeguarding concerns. BSDT staff deal with referrals quickly and effectively. Trainers and mentors train apprentices well in health and safety processes in the Academy and their workplaces. As a result, apprentices know the potential dangers where they work. For example, they know how to avoid the risks when working with the high voltages in electric vehicles.

BSDT leaders have implemented effective procedures to ensure that all apprentices, particularly 16- to 18-year-olds, are safe when staying overnight at the Academy. For example, all apprentices have individual rooms, and a trained adult staff member stays overnight. Women and young apprentices' accommodation is separate from other apprentices.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- BSDT's leaders and managers should enable consistently good coordination of on- and off-the-job training by ensuring routinely effective contact and communications between CPAs, mentors and apprentices.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that apprentices receive sufficient guidance on their career choices outside of BMW.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that a high proportion of apprentices use the online learning system to start building their basic knowledge in advance of their practical sessions at the Academy.
- Apprentices following English and mathematics functional skills programmes should be able to identify the practical value of the new knowledge they have learned.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51859
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Website	https://www.babcocktraining.com/
Principal/CEO	Stuart Wilson, Director Civil Training
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	5 November 2010
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of workplace learning and skills, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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