



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

# Babington Business College

## SUMMARY

Babington Business College offers satisfactory training in the business administration and management and professional areas, with good opportunities for work experience. Agriculture training is well planned and effectively meets trainees' needs. The assessment of trainees' work is poorly planned in all occupational areas except agriculture. Equal opportunities procedures are satisfactory. All trainees receive effective regular support and guidance to achieve their programme targets. There are systems throughout the organisation providing a satisfactory platform for management of training. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory, but have not ensured consistent quality or practice across all sites.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2
Management & professional	3
Business administration	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ rigorous and effective assessment in agriculture
- ◆ positive recruitment strategies to attract applicants from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ effective use of management information to inform planning
- ◆ effective programme reviews
- ◆ good trainee induction

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment planning
- ◆ little workplace assessment
- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ high number of early leavers
- ◆ some employers not committed to NVQs
- ◆ limited individual action-planning

## INTRODUCTION

1. Babington Business College Ltd was established in 1974. It is a privately owned training provider and operates as a sole trader, employing 71 staff, of whom 25 are part-time employees. It operates from six training centres: Derby, Nottingham, Sheffield, Dewsbury, Stoke-on-Trent and Lichfield. The head office is in Derby.

2. Almost all of Babington Business College's work is funded through contracts with nine training and enterprise councils (TECs): Leeds, Calderdale and Kirklees, Wakefield, Sheffield, Staffordshire, South and East Cheshire, Greater Nottingham, North Derbyshire and Southern Derbyshire. The college subcontracts a small part of its work to an agricultural organisation which specialises in dealing with trainees with special learning needs. In four other TEC areas, Babington Business College operates as a subcontractor to other providers which, themselves, contract directly with their local TECs. Babington Business College also provides some off-the-job training for other training providers and employers on a commercial basis.

3. At the time of inspection, there were 510 people in training, of whom 353 are modern apprentices, 17 are on national traineeship programmes and 140 are on other youth programmes. With the exception of 84 of the latter, all trainees are employed. There are 274 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 2 to 4 in accountancy, 181 trainees follow NVQs at levels 2 to 4 in administration, with a further 44 in insurance at NVQ levels 2 and 3. Most trainees take additional qualifications, as well as their main NVQ programme. For example, accountancy trainees follow the association of accounting technicians (AAT) professional programme alongside their NVQ. Insurance trainees take the chartered insurance institute (CII) professional programmes of study and NVQ level 3 in customer service. Administration trainees also take NVQ level 2 in information technology, NVQ level 3 customer service and word-processing qualifications. Twelve trainees are following NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in amenity and commercial horticulture, subcontracted to a local specialist training provider. Babington Business College's programmes are largely employer-based, although all trainees attend day-release sessions at one of the training centres for one day each week between September and June each year. Most administration trainees are placed with employers in the service sector. Accounts trainees are to be found largely in accounting practices, while insurance trainees are usually placed with brokers.

4. Average unemployment rates across the area vary from 4.9 per cent in Greater Nottingham to 8.7 per cent in Sheffield, although there are pockets of much higher unemployment in some inner-city areas. Unemployment rates for the other areas range from 8 per cent in West Yorkshire and 6.7 per cent in Staffordshire to 5.1 per cent in Derby, compared with a national average of 5.1 per cent.

5. In Derbyshire, the employment context has changed, from relying heavily on mining to a greater emphasis on work in the service sector, although there is still

significant employment in engineering. Staffordshire is a mature industrial area, with manufacturing as the main employment sector; this includes the ceramics industry in the north of the county. The number of people working in the service sector is growing steadily. In Nottingham, manufacturing, distribution and the service sectors are the main sources of employment. Both west and south Yorkshire retain a considerable amount of employment in manufacturing, although in the west of Yorkshire, Leeds is a major regional financial centre.

6. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 32.6 per cent for Stoke-on-Trent, 38.0 per cent for Sheffield, 26.1 per cent for Nottingham and 38.2 per cent for Derby, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. The management team carried out the self-assessment process after consulting staff, employees and trainees. The report claims several strengths and weaknesses, some of which represent no more than normal practice. Since carrying out self-assessment, action has been implemented to address some weaknesses identified in the report. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses which had not been reported by the college.

8. A team of nine inspectors spent a total of 42 days at Babington Business College in October 1998. They visited 55 employers, interviewed 126 trainees, 36 workplace supervisors and 33 members of staff. Inspectors looked at the provision at all six training centres, the head office and at the premises of the subcontracted training provider. They examined a broad range of supporting documentation, including trainees' portfolios, assessment records, reviews, files and external verifiers' reports. Twenty-three sessions of learning were observed, as detailed below:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture		1				1
Management & professional	1	3	3			7
Business administration	1	4	10			15
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Agriculture

### Grade 2

9. The amenity and commercial horticulture provision is subcontracted to a local specialist training provider, a registered charity operating from an 11-acre leasehold site, close to the city centre. The subcontracting arrangement came into effect in April 1998. There are 12 trainees on commercial and amenity horticulture programmes at NVQ levels 1 and 2. All trainees have additional learning needs. The site is well equipped for commercial horticulture and trades as a commercial production nursery and plant centre. Additionally, specialist vegetables are grown on a commercial basis. The subcontractor also provides some landscape contracting services on a semicommercial basis. The commercial activities ensure that assessment is carried out in a working environment. Inspectors found additional strengths to those in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the college.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff
- ◆ well-planned and -delivered training
- ◆ rigorous and effective assessment and tracking systems
- ◆ good commercial horticulture training resources
- ◆ helpful mentoring arrangements

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak review procedures for trainees
- ◆ trainees' feedback not used to improve programme quality

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Experienced trainees are used as mentors to assist trainees lacking in confidence and experience. This practice develops the supervisory skills of the mentor, as well as the confidence of the younger, less-experienced trainees.*

10. Staff show a high level of commitment to their work and develop productive working relationships with trainees. The use of responsible and motivated trainees as mentors helps to improve trainees' confidence and support their learning. Training is well planned and delivered to a high standard, enabling trainees to achieve the required occupational levels. Assessment is also rigorous and well planned. It is carried out fairly and tailored to meet individuals' needs. Trainees discuss their training with enthusiasm.

11. Although well equipped for commercial horticulture, there is a lack of fine amenity turf areas for amenity horticulture trainees. This has been recognised as an area for improvement, and steps have been taken to rectify the situation. Trainees' review procedures lack rigour, compromising the effectiveness of the process. Formal feedback from trainees is not used to monitor or improve the effectiveness of training.

### Management & professional

### Grade 3

12. There are 44 trainees following NVQ levels 2 and 3 in insurance and customer service, all of whom are employed. Seventeen trainees are modern apprentices and 27 are on other youth programmes. The usual pattern is for trainees to complete insurance level 2, then customer service levels 2 and 3, followed by insurance level 3, over three years. Trainees are employed in local insurance brokers, providing on-the-job instruction. Off-the-job training is carried out in two parts: a theory session provides trainees with the necessary knowledge and understanding for their NVQ, and a workshop session assists them with portfolio-building. The college also issues its own certificate. The self-assessment report claimed several strengths and weaknesses, some of which represent no more than normal practice or contractual requirements. However, additional strengths and weaknesses were identified, and the grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective off-the-job training

- ◆ good employer placements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ assessments lack rigour
- ◆ little assessment planning

13. Employers and monitoring staff plan work experience for trainees, to support their development. Employers provide a broad range of work which meets trainees' needs. Trainers frequently adapt learning programmes to match the immediate demands of trainees' work, as well as negotiating the widening of their experiences at work, where required. Trainees are offered the opportunity to take additional qualifications, such as customer service NVQs. These significantly increase the total number of NVQs awarded. There is a good standard of teaching and off-the-job training. Trainers are knowledgeable about both their subject areas and the NVQ standards to which trainees are working. Rapport between tutors and trainees is good, and sessions are well planned. Trainers show considerable expertise in responding to the different needs of trainees.

14. Assessments are not sufficiently robust. There is little direct observation of trainees' performance in the workplace by qualified assessors. There are few qualified assessors. Trainees collect evidence, from their workplace, which is validated by their supervisor or manager. In some cases, witness testimonies are prepared in advance by the college and handed to the supervisor or manager to sign. Trainees are directed to the evidence which they should produce from their workplace, rather than identifying naturally occurring evidence. Evidence is gathered in the workplace by trainees and then transferred to portfolios during off-the-job training sessions. Portfolios remain on the college's premises. Assessors are currently working towards relevant assessor awards, but several have been doing so for a considerable time. This has been highlighted by the external verifier. There is no individual planning of assessments. Although many early leavers achieve an NVQ, several leave without obtaining any qualifications.

### **Business administration**

### **Grade 3**

15. Babington Business College has 454 trainees in this area, of whom 336 are modern apprentices, 17 are on national traineeships and 101 are on other youth programmes. There are 382 employed trainees, and the remaining 72 are on work placement with local companies and organisations. One hundred and eighty-one trainees follow NVQ levels 1 to 3 in administration and 273 are taking accountancy NVQs at levels 2 to 4. Many trainees are also offered short courses in word-processing and computer literacy, and accounts trainees also follow AAT professional programmes of study in addition to their NVQ. Trainees spend one day each week on day release at the college's premises. With some exceptions, the self-assessment report accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good NVQ achievements
- ◆ frequent monitoring visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ clear lesson materials and guidelines for trainers
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ additional qualifications to complement main NVQ programme
- ◆ well-motivated trainees

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' goals not set on an individual basis
- ◆ trainees unaware that they can progress at own pace
- ◆ weak assessment planning
- ◆ limited employer involvement in workplace assessment
- ◆ high number of early leavers

16. College staff have developed good working relationships with employers, many of whom recruit trainees on a repeat basis. All trainees are placed or employed in organisations before joining the programme. Most employers offer good work experience and on-the-job training, releasing trainees for off-the-job training at the college's premises. Most trainees are visited in the workplace every six to eight weeks. However, opportunities for linking new skills learnt at work with off-the-job training are often missed. Insufficient information is given to employers about the NVQ process and the rôle of the supervisor in assessing trainees in the workplace. NVQ achievements compare favourably with local and national figures, and many trainees achieve multiple qualifications during the course of their training. All trainees are aware of key skills. In most cases, key skills training and assessment are integrated with the main NVQ programme.

17. Classroom training is good, and trainees demonstrate a high level of motivation to learn. They are well supported and particularly appreciate the additional qualifications available to them. However, there is little individual training or assessment planning. Trainees are unaware that they can progress at their own pace, rather than that of their peer group. The review process is not consistent across all centres. In some centres, subject tutors are able to monitor many of their own trainees, while, in others, monitoring is carried out by staff without technical knowledge. Too many trainees leave the programme before completion.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

18. Babington Business College has systems and procedures covering TEC and



statutory requirements for equal opportunities. The self-assessment report claims strengths which represent no more than normal practice. The self-assessment report accurately identified some weaknesses. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good use of external agencies to promote participation of those from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ good multilingual recruitment literature
- ◆ positive recruitment strategies to attract representation of those from minority ethnic groups

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ restricted access to most centres
- ◆ trainee selection discretionary rather than systematic
- ◆ some staff lack understanding of equal opportunities issues

19. The college's marketing literature promotes equal opportunities, and multilingual literature is available to accommodate the local minority ethnic communities, particularly targeting parents to persuade them that work-based training is as relevant as going to college. The college is active in promoting its training opportunities to minority groups and uses support from local TECs and specialist race advisers. Staff attend careers conventions and job fairs, where multilingual literature has been used effectively. In addition, trainees from minority ethnic groups have willingly participated in recruitment activities. All employers are required to acknowledge the college's equal opportunity policy and must nominate a named representative to ensure that the policy is adhered to.

20. Five of the college's premises have very limited access for trainees with mobility problems, as most are located on the second or third floor. No lifts are available. Procedures for the acceptance or rejection of trainees is discretionary, rather than systematic across all centres and could be open to abuse. Some trainees scored well in selection tests and interviews, but were rejected, whereas others, with comparable scores, were accepted. Some newly recruited staff do not understand equal opportunities. They are unable to accurately describe how they would incorporate this in good working practice. However, before inspection, the college had planned a staff training session to address this. The organisation's equal opportunities policy has been updated, as it did not make reference to the latest legislation on disability and discrimination. However, not all centres are using the revised version.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

21. Babington Business College provides a supportive environment for trainees. Pastoral, as well as academic, support is offered both in the centre and during workplace visits. Many trainees are employed before they start the programme, but,

with the exception of those following the agriculture programme, an employer placement must be found for each new starter not already employed before he/she commences training. The self-assessment report claimed several strengths, some of which represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive and detailed annual work plan issued to trainees
- ◆ thorough and well-structured induction
- ◆ action is taken promptly to resolve problems
- ◆ good response to trainees with specific academic or pastoral requirements
- ◆ successful placement of trainees in employment
- ◆ outstanding pastoral support in agriculture

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ variable advice and guidance to leavers

22. All trainees receive a well-planned induction, during which they are issued with a work plan showing their planned route through to qualification. This may be varied to meet specific needs and accommodate holidays, but serves as a general guide throughout the programme. Trainees' feedback is gathered regularly and is acted on. Trainees who experience particular problems, either in training or at work, are well-supported and given additional help, where necessary. Pastoral support is outstanding, and trainees whose problems are beyond the remit of staff are helped to obtain expert assistance from other agencies. Staff make considerable efforts to ensure that trainees achieve employment as soon as possible after they finish training.

23. Initial assessment consists of interviews and testing trainees' mathematics ability and English skills. These tests have been amended from time to time to the extent that they are no longer valid for assessing trainees' competence. Initial assessment is not used effectively to match trainees' experience or ability against NVQ and key skills criteria. Trainees who hold relevant certificates from other sources can have these considered for accreditation of prior learning. Although the support systems are comprehensive and well documented, visit records are not completed systematically, and action points are not documented. The number of trainees leaving early is high, and advice and guidance available to trainees who are due to leave the programme are variable.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 3**

24. Management of Babington Business College is devolved from the Derby site

through centre managers. Communication with staff takes place through formal and informal meetings, telephone contact and internal memoranda. Each centre contracts with several TECs and works to targets which are negotiated between the general manager and the centre manager. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified during self-assessment, but some were seen as no more than normal practice. Other strengths and weaknesses were identified, and the grade awarded is lower than that proposed by the college.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear, well-communicated lines of accountability
- ◆ good use of management information to monitor performance
- ◆ comprehensive staff development programme

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited employer understanding of NVQ process
- ◆ poor commitment to NVQs by employers
- ◆ some poor-quality staff induction

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Staff starting work at Babington Business College are issued with a regularly updated sheet entitled 'Who to go to'. This details line management responsibilities throughout the company.*

25. Babington Business College has a well-defined structure which is understood by all staff. Employees are clear about lines of accountability and know whom they should approach with queries and concerns. Some staff hold dual responsibilities, combining the rôles of assessor and progress monitor. In some cases, this combination works appropriately; in others, it causes confusion for trainees who do not understand whether the purpose of monitoring visits is for staff to assess them or to review their progress. Staff development is generally comprehensive. The company has well-designed procedures for staff appraisal. These include an annual observation of performance and twice-yearly discussions with line managers, in which progress and problems are evaluated and discussed.

26. The organisation has a comprehensive management information system used to ensure that centres are updated on their progress and that of the organisation as a whole. Realistic and achievable targets are set using the data collected. Performance data are used as the basis of discussion at team and management meetings. Staff are well informed about TEC and company targets and about the implications of these for their individual workloads. Managers use a variety of direct and indirect means of communication among centres, including meetings, personal memoranda and delegation of work through the centre managers. Although staff at some centres feel well informed and appropriately consulted, others do not. For example, one group of employees had only one team meeting this year.

27. Not all the employers used by the college share the company's view of the importance of NVQs. Some are reluctant to allow trainees the time to attend a full day's off-the-job training. This clearly disadvantages those trainees concerned, but indirectly affects other trainees, since the content of some off-the-job sessions is repeated when trainees next attend. A few employers are openly critical of NVQs. Others do not fully understand how the programmes work or what part they should

play in helping trainees to gather appropriate evidence for assessment.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

28. Babington Business College meets both the external quality standards required by the TECs with which it contracts and the requirements of the awarding bodies. The college is an Investor in People. The self-assessment report claimed some strengths which represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and some weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ trainees/employers' views are sought through comprehensive questionnaires
- ◆ comprehensive internal audit procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ standards and systems are not applied evenly across all centres
- ◆ some staff are ill-informed about the self-assessment process

29. Trainees complete questionnaires at the end of both their three-day induction programme and each year. Responses are analysed, with the results discussed and acted on at management meetings. The company has well-documented quality procedures about externally set standards. Recruitment, NVQ achievement and other related targets are discussed and agreed on with centres and are regularly assessed for progress. A system of self-evaluation by tutors of their planning, preparation and delivery of training sessions is carried out. Internal audits of systems and procedures, health and safety and other quality aspects are regularly and rigorously carried out, documented and discussed. Internal verification is regularly carried out to a satisfactory standard.

30. There is a system for evaluating the quality of training delivery, but implementation is variable. Trainees' progress monitoring is not carried out to the same regularity and standard across all centres. Some staff were not involved in the self-assessment process and have not seen the self-assessment report.