

INSPECTION REPORT

Mitsui Babcock Energy Limited

11 March 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

Mitsui Babcock Energy Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Mitsui Babcock Energy Limited (Mitsui Babcock) is a mechanical engineering company operating in the engineering construction industry. It has been a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsui Engineering and Shipbuilding (Tokyo) since 1996 and is a member of the relevant industry association. Its main business is the repair and maintenance of major capital plant installations across the United Kingdom and Europe, including coal, gas and nuclear power generation, oil refineries, chemical process plant, pharmaceuticals, steel-works and other process plant installations. To meet its contracts within the energy services sector, Mitsui Babcock employs 1,750-2,500 craft level employees. The company's head office is situated in Crawley, West Sussex. The offices in Tipton, West Midlands, provide service support for site and regional activities, as well as being the administrative centre for training. The training centre at Tipton is approved as a centre for the delivery of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and apprenticeships by the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB).

2. Mitsui Babcock has provided commercial training for apprentices since the 1980s and contributes to an industry initiative to remedy the national skills shortages by training employees, using a training route leading to ECITB-accredited NVQs, called the National Skills Development Scheme (NSDS). Mitsui Babcock uses this training system to support the craft elements of the apprenticeship and to train adult employees. However, a major review of the company's training strategy in October 2002 revealed that it was not providing sufficient craft workers in all skills areas to meet company needs. Mitsui Babcock secured funding through the National Employers' Service of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to supplement ECITB training and has been delivering LSC-funded work-based learning programmes since August 2003.

3. Using LSC funding, the company introduced NVQ management programmes at levels 3 and 4 for adult learners, in 2003. Mitsui Babcock has used ECITB's supervisory management training and development scheme (SMTDS) for over 10 years for craft employees and graduate recruits entering as frontline supervisors. As with the ECITB NSDS scheme for engineers, there is no set duration for the programme and timescales for achievement are dependent on the learners' motivation to collect portfolio evidence.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. There are 145 learners engaged in engineering programmes and one learner following a construction industry NVQ at level 3 in moving loads. Sixty-six engineering learners are engaged in work-based learning apprenticeships and 79 engineers are completing NVQs at level 2 or 3. Apprentices complete an NVQ at level 2 as an additional qualification. Programmes lead to qualifications in steel erection, pipefitting or welding. Adult learners complete most of their training on the job, but attend the company's training centre at

MITSUI BABCOCK ENERGY LIMITED

Tipton during the first year for an eight-week off-the-job training programme. Apprentices attend the training centre for eight months for off-the-job training during their first year and spend the remaining four months located at sites for on-the-job training and competence assessment. Mitsui Babcock subcontracts with two further education colleges to provide the training required for apprentices to complete the technical certificate and key skills aspects of the qualification framework. Learners are expected to complete the NVQ at level 2, technical certificate and the key skills qualifications during the first year. There are three full-time lead assessors supported by 70 employees qualified as assessors in the workplace. A further 16 employees are working towards assessor training. The company has 12 qualified internal verifiers and a further five employees are engaged in training to become internal verifiers.

Business administration, management & professional

5. There are 28 learners on management and business administration programmes distributed nationally throughout Mitsui Babcock's work sites. Twenty-six learners are following an NVQ at level 3 management programme and two are following the NVQ management programme at level 4. There is no formal off-the-job training for management and administration learners and learners are largely responsible for planning progression towards learning goals in collaboration with their workplace supervisors and assessors. There are four assessors working with the management learners and two internal verifiers. One assessor based at the Tipton training centre assesses the administration learners, with a subcontractor carrying out internal verification. All learners are employed by the company and work at various site locations around the country or at Tipton facilities. Most learners on the management programmes have completed all or part of the SMTDS before being enrolled onto the NVQ programme. Learners are recruited onto the programme through appraisal, or personal recommendation from managers within the company.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	28
Number of learners interviewed	69
Number of staff interviewed	33
Number of subcontractors interviewed	6
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The training provision at Mitsui Babcock is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The company's leadership and management are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity and for quality assurance are satisfactory. Its training provision for engineering, technology and manufacturing is good and its business administration, management and professional training provision is satisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality assurance		3

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Mechanical engineering		
- Other government-funded provision	79	2
- Apprenticeships for young people	66	2

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Management		
- Work-based learning for adults	28	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. The proportion of learners retained on training across all engineering and management programmes is very high. Generally, the learners are well motivated and display good knowledge and practical skills. Management learners self-manage their learning programmes well.

8. The engineering apprentices are making good progress, leading to achievement of the full qualification framework. Achievement of key skills qualifications by apprentice welders and steel erectors is particularly good. However, apprentices in pipefitting are progressing towards qualifications at a slower rate than their counterparts. Subcontracted arrangements for the delivery of key skills to pipefitters is weak and the company is working to deal with this. Achievement of the technical certificate element of the programme is high for all apprentices.

9. Adult learners on NVQ programmes are achieving well in engineering and in management. However, in some cases for on-site engineers, a fall in work has slowed their progress through training. Their training opportunities are dependent upon the availability of contract work to the company.

10. **Mitsui Babcock has developed engineering and management training programmes to include provision of skills in areas additional to the learners' primary goals.** Learners benefit from gaining qualifications valued within the engineering construction industry additional to the primary qualification target. The skills and knowledge gained by learners is enabling them to function more effectively as skilled craft workers and managers.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	5
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	2	4	1	0	0	7

11. **Managers plan the off-the-job training well for engineers at the Tipton training centre.** Training programmes are well designed and these enable learners to acquire the basic set of engineering skills required for the job. The tutors monitor the learners' progress closely to ensure that they become proficient.

12. **Workplace supervisors plan on-the-job training for engineers well and enable the learners to achieve competence in essential skills.** The company has a good strategy for management training, all of which is delivered at work sites. Training managers are implementing plans to increase the number of management assessors and verifiers and strengthen the support available to learners.

13. **The company has implemented effective arrangements for the assessment of learners' vocational aptitude before engineering training.** Learners are tested for mechanical comprehension and engage in a broad range of practical tests. Managers use the findings of these tests to guide the development of individual learning plans and set realistic goals for achievement. Assessment of skills for life is carried out by the subcontractor colleges and they identify and meet the learners' additional support needs.

14. **Engineering workplace supervisors and training staff are very experienced and highly qualified.** They use their experience effectively to impart knowledge and skills to the learners. Learners give due recognition of the quality of the training and they are appreciative of the support they receive during their training.

15. **Training managers, tutors and workplace supervisors are particularly supportive of the engineering learners.** Throughout training, the learners work under the close supervision of experienced tradespeople and the support given extends beyond course requirements. Where learners have experienced difficulties with workshop tasks, the company offers individual support. Learners are encouraged by their workplace supervisors to seek pastoral support in matters relating to social and domestic matters.

16. Mitsui Babcock has ensured that the general range of engineering equipment and machinery is adequate to meet the needs of training fully. The company has made considerable investment in off-the-job training resources, including specialist equipment and plant, in order to match those used in the workplace.

17. In management training there are sufficient resources to deliver training effectively. The company has recently introduced an intranet with a website to support training. Many learners have benefited from this, but not all learners are fully aware of the website's existence. Generally, management training learners receive good on-site support from their workplace supervisors and learning is integrated with work tasks.

18. Learners are satisfied that their training programmes meet their aspirations, and workplace supervisors are satisfied that learners receive training in the skills required to complete their jobs to high standards. Induction programmes are effective and during the first four weeks learners are able to engage in activities from the main skills areas in order to reaffirm their career aspirations.

19. The procedures that workplace supervisors use for assessing the learners' engineering competences in the workplace over-emphasise witness testimonies.

Generally, workplace supervisors need to complete other work tasks and have insufficient time to complete learners' assessments. Managers are aware of poor assessment arrangements and have sought to make improvements through the appointment of three full-time assessors.

20. The arrangements for management training induction and initial assessment are incomplete. Some learners have only vague recollection of their learning plans and they are not sufficiently aware of agreed learning goals. Individual plans do not identify learners' skills for life competences or record whether additional support needs are required.

21. In management training, the company has adopted a policy to train those on-site employees who have completed the NVQ programme as assessors and verifiers. The scheme is proving popular with employees and they are keen to support and advise new learners. **However, learners' progress is not reviewed routinely and targets set by workplace supervisors and work-based assessors are often insufficiently specific and do not identify timescales for achievement.**

Leadership and management

22. Mitsui Babcock has made a strategic commitment to developing a highly skilled workforce by heavily investing in training programmes. The company has developed a good advanced apprenticeship scheme for engineers. Workplace supervisors and managers are able to enhance their business skills through the management programmes.

23. The company has established good working partnerships with outside organisations to develop and improve its training programmes. Managers work with appropriate bodies to help develop the NVQ standards and apprenticeship frameworks. Managers have good working relationships with one of the company's subcontractors and work in partnership to ensure training standards are consistent with the work standards expected on site.

24. Managers make good use of management information systems to monitor the effectiveness of training programmes. Retention, achievement and the completion of learners' progress reviews are monitored routinely and training managers have introduced effective systems to monitor learners' progress throughout their training programmes. However, regional co-ordination of training is still developing and is yet to become fully effective.

25. Managers have introduced action-planning as part of self-assessment arrangements and have written a development action plan. Managers do not monitor well the effective implementation of planned actions. Many identified actions lack specific or realistic timescales and some actions included in the development plan have not been completed. Managers' records of the progress and success of actions are insufficiently detailed or complete.

26. The company has recently supplemented its corporate policy for equal opportunities with one that supports equality of opportunity for learners. Generally, learners and staff have a satisfactory awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues, although some staff who have not received staff training recently in equality and diversity have insufficient awareness of policies and practices.

27. The company has strict rules relating to bullying and harassment. Managers and workplace supervisors ensure that any incidents in breach of these rules are dealt with promptly and appropriately. There are well-documented procedures for complaints and grievances, and action taken is recorded systematically.

28. Monitoring of recruitment data is carried out systematically and managers use the findings to develop strategies for increasing the numbers of learners from under-represented groups. Managers have introduced marketing strategies to promote greater numbers of applicants from under-represented groups, including forging links with outside support groups and organisations. However, these initiatives have been unsuccessful.

29. The company encourages applications from people with disabilities but acknowledges that access to the training centre and on-site locations for them is difficult. The high-risk working conditions and extreme demands of the job make this industry unsuited to many people with disabilities. Managers carry out full risk assessments for all learners.

30. Managers at the Tipton training centre have produced well-documented quality assurance procedures manuals for the advanced apprenticeship programmes. Quality

assurance procedures are still in their infancy and not all have been implemented or evaluated. Procedures do not yet fully cover adult learning programmes. Staff use a good range of methods to gain feedback from apprentices, including questionnaires, although managers have yet to extend feedback arrangements to cover adult learners.

31. The company has introduced effective arrangements for self-assessment as part of its quality assurance arrangements. The process has resulted in detailed and comprehensive annual review reports being written that cover recruitment, induction and training during the learners' courses. The self-assessment report is detailed, self-critical and accurately identifies the major strengths and weaknesses of provision.

32. Managers have not yet introduced effective systems for internal verification. In many cases, internal verifiers are leaving verification until learners have completed their portfolios of evidence, rather than apply verification practices progressively throughout their training. Managers are aware of the weaknesses in the present system and they are seeking to make improvement through staff training and development, and the introduction of regular standardisation meetings.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear corporate mission to develop a highly skilled workforce
- good partnership working to develop training programmes
- effective systems to manage learners' training
- effective management of complaints and grievance procedures
- good range and use of feedback from apprentices
- thorough self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- ineffective monitoring of actions
- incomplete implementation and evaluation of quality assurance procedures
- weak internal verification processes

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Mechanical engineering

Strengths

- high numbers of learners remaining in training
- very good progress through the apprenticeship framework
- broad range of additional qualifications achieved
- good off-the-job training
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- weak key skills training arrangements for pipe-fitter apprentices
- poor assessment practices for some learners
- insufficient equal opportunities awareness by staff and adult learners

Business administration, management & professional

Management

Strengths

- good achievement by management learners
- good commitment to continuing professional development for learners and staff

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough induction for management learners
- no arrangements for formal review of learners' progress

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT MITSUI BABCOCK ENERGY LIMITED:

- 'the tutors, they're friendly, and we feel we are treated as equals'
- the variety of work in the training programme
- 'the course gives us a good view of general engineering industry'
- 'support given to us by the tutors'
- 'it's a good company to work for'
- 'gaining qualifications and becoming a tradesman'
- the company develops people and invests in them
- 'I like the way they listen to the views of the workers'
- the experience and knowledge of the tutors and managers at the Tipton training centre

WHAT LEARNERS THINK MITSUI BABCOCK ENERGY LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- better payroll arrangements, particularly travel expenses
- delivery of key skills for pipefitters
- the amount of contact with the site-based assessors
- the time allowed for completing logbooks
- better target-setting
- 'don't bolt training onto the daily workload of managers'

KEY CHALLENGES FOR MITSUI BABCOCK ENERGY LIMITED:

- improve internal verification arrangements
- develop induction and review process for adult learners
- improve management support to on-site assessors
- fully implement and evaluate quality assurance arrangements
- improve staff awareness for equality of opportunity issues

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- clear corporate mission to develop a highly skilled workforce
- good partnership working to develop training programmes
- effective systems to manage learners' training
- effective management of complaints and grievance procedures
- good range and use of feedback from apprentices
- thorough self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- ineffective monitoring of actions
- incomplete implementation and evaluation of quality assurance procedures
- weak internal verification processes

33. Mitsui Babcock has made significant strategic commitment to the development of a highly skilled workforce. The company recognises that the current workforce is aging and many craft employees are likely to leave the industry in the next five years. A good range of training programmes has been developed to deal with these issues. A successful training programme in welding has reduced the company average age of welders from 46 to below 40. Good training programmes are available for new and existing employees in erecting/rigging and pipefitting. A specialist rig is being constructed to train erectors and rectify a significant craft trade deficit. Workplace supervisors and managers are able to enhance their business skills through an effective management programme. To increase the number of young people joining the sector, Mitsui Babcock has successfully built on its experience of working as a subcontractor by developing a good advanced apprenticeship scheme.

34. Significant investment has been made in training and developing staff to manage, train and assess the programmes. The annual appraisal system is used effectively to identify most staff training needs. Almost all tutors based at Tipton are trained assessors and have been trained in instructional techniques. Staff have a very good range of craft-related and health and safety qualifications and experience. One tutor has achieved the 'enable learning through demonstration and instruction' unit of the NVQ at level 3 in learning and development. None of the tutors have any teaching qualifications.

35. Mitsui Babcock has established good working partnerships with a variety of organisations to develop and improve the training programmes. Very effective working relationships have been established with one subcontractor. Changes have been made to the delivery of the technical certificate to ensure that learners do not repeat practical training they receive at the Tipton training centre. Equipment and personal protective

equipment are supplied to the subcontractor so that learners develop good standards of work that are consistent with those expected on site. The managers are involved with the relevant bodies to help develop the NVQ standards and apprenticeship frameworks. Customers work effectively with Mitsui Babcock by providing scrap materials and spare equipment for learners to practise their skills. Special rigs are developed to ensure that learners can practise specific skills before going on site.

36. In an industry where there is significant seasonal fluctuation in workforce requirements and regular redundancies, Mitsui Babcock has made it a policy to try and provide continuous employment for all types of learners on training programmes. This maximises their opportunities for success. Managers make good use of the management information systems to monitor the workforce's demands and the training needs to ensure future projects and contracts are suitably staffed. Managers effectively monitor learners' retention, achievement and completion of progress reviews. The company uses a good range of graphs to monitor the performance of the contracts. It uses effective monitoring systems in the training centre to ensure that learners complete each stage of their training before progressing to the next. Detailed service-level agreements exist with subcontractors and regular meetings ensure that the learners' progress towards achievement of technical certificates and key skills is monitored closely.

37. Communications are generally satisfactory. Regular team meetings are held with staff at the Tipton training centre and with regional training co-ordinators to discuss all aspects of the training programme. The communication and co-ordination of activities between regions and sites is not always effective. At different times of the year, priorities and work pressures change and training and assessments are not carried out routinely.

38. The company's action-planning processes are not effective at ensuring that actions are completed when expected or are effective at dealing with the issues identified. Many actions recorded in reports and minutes of meetings lack specific or realistic timescales. Some actions from the development plan in 2003-04 have not been completed and continue to be actions in the development plan for 2004-05. Several actions do not specify the person responsible for completing the action or the outcomes expected. The current systems do not clearly record when actions have been completed and whether they have been successful. Some actions carried out are not recorded or monitored.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

39. Mitsui Babcock has a detailed and comprehensive corporate policy for equal opportunities which is subject to annual review. This policy is supplemented with a newly introduced policy to support equality of opportunity for learners. The policies clearly define the company's commitment to equality of opportunity. There is a designated manager with responsibility for implementation of policies and procedures. This person is identified to learners as the first point of contact in relation to all equal opportunities matters. The company has strict rules relating to bullying and harassment and these are enforced thoroughly. The company recognises the importance of effective implementation of its policies and procedures to ensure an environment free of harassment for apprentices attending residential training programmes. Few instances of

bullying have occurred during the past year. There are well-documented procedures for complaints and grievance and for appeals against assessment outcomes. Complaints and actions taken are recorded systematically. Actions are taken promptly and follow clearly documented guidelines.

40. Generally, engineering apprentices have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity issues. This is reinforced during induction and during progress review sessions, where the company uses materials promoting equality of opportunity. The induction programme covers equality of opportunity issues for all learners and they sign to confirm that they have understood the equal opportunities policy and agree to abide by it. Mitsui Babcock has developed a series of questions and case studies, which training co-ordinators carrying out progress reviews use to evaluate learners' understanding of issues and to initiate discussion about equality of opportunity in the workplace. However, these procedures are not used as thoroughly for adult learners, some of whom do not have adequate knowledge of equality of opportunity issues. Systems to monitor equality of opportunity for these learners are incomplete.

41. Mitsui Babcock routinely monitors recruitment and uses data to develop strategies and action to promote equality and diversity. Data shows that the recruitment of female learners and those learners from minority ethnic groups is low. Of 514 applicants for the 2004-05 intake of learners, only one was a woman and 12 were from minority ethnic groups. Of 48 learners recruited, none were women and two were from minority ethnic groups. At present, there is one female learner and one learner from a minority ethnic group. Mitsui Babcock's recruitment from traditionally under-represented groups is in line with the national industry workforce profile, which shows 2.1 per cent of site workers are women and 1.6 per cent are from minority ethnic groups.

42. Action plans to promote the industry and training opportunities to under-represented groups have been developed as part of the overall development action plan for learning. Mitsui Babcock has introduced new marketing materials for photographs promoting the inclusion of women and people from minority ethnic groups. The company has forged links with organisations and support groups in order to work in partnership to widen participation. For example, female learners have been used as part of publicity campaigns, although the initiatives to date have been unsuccessful.

43. Equality and diversity issues are discussed as standard items on the agendas of management meetings. Through self-assessment and the gathering of feedback from learners and staff, Mitsui Babcock has developed an action plan for equality and diversity in line with corporate needs of the company and to meet the equality and diversity impact measures set by the LSC's National Employers' Service. The company places importance upon the implementation of equality of opportunity and has provided in-service training for staff to raise awareness and understanding of the issues. Not all staff, however, have attended training and some actions to deal with areas for improvement have yet to be completed.

44. General access to training facilities and work sites for people with restricted mobility is difficult. Very few applications for training as pipefitters, erectors and welders are

received from people with disabilities due to the risks and demanding nature of the work. Mitsui Babcock, however, encourages applications from disabled people to those areas of the company's activities where a disability does not preclude full involvement. The company carries out full risk assessments for all learners as part of the recruitment and selection process.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

45. Mitsui Babcock's training centre at Tipton has a quality assurance manual and a separate procedures manual for all of the activities on the advanced apprenticeship training programme. The quality assurance manual is part of the company's quality assurance system which is approved to an international quality assurance standard and is audited regularly. The training department's procedures manual is controlled by the development manager, craft skills. These procedures were developed in the past 18 months and do not yet include all activities relating to adult learners. Not all of the procedures have been fully implemented or evaluated. For example, the observations of induction, progress reviews and training have started, but there is no plan in place to ensure all activities and staff are observed during the year. Some procedures have been implemented but are not being followed effectively, such as the review of learners' progress. Management are aware of this through internal audits and monitoring systems. Action is being taken to increase the proportion of learners receiving reviews every 12 weeks and management information systems are in place to measure this monthly. Some procedures, such as site placement, have not yet been evaluated to check their effectiveness and to ensure compliance. A few procedures do not reflect current practices and are being revised.

46. The company uses a good range of methods effectively to gain feedback from learners. Mitsui Babcock uses questionnaires to evaluate the recruitment process at the end of the assessment day, the induction process, and the first year of off-the-job training. These questionnaires are analysed and used effectively in detailed reports, which recommend improvements to the different stages of the programme. In addition to this, managers hold a meeting with learners in their second year to inform them of the improvements made following their feedback and to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in a constructive manner. The same approach was used with tutors and regional training co-ordinators to identify areas for improvement. There are no procedures in place to formally gather feedback from adult learners. Questionnaires have recently been sent to on-site mentors but these have not yet been collated or used to review the on-site aspects of the programme. So far, no comparisons have been made between the feedback gathered in 2003 and 2004 to start to identify any trends or to evaluate the changes made.

47. The self-assessment process is clearly defined in a flow chart that forms part of the quality assurance procedures manual. The company produces effective review reports each year on recruitment, induction, and end-of-year training to help develop the self-assessment process. The reports draw on feedback from learners as well as on information from tutors, regional training co-ordinators and the management information systems. Other useful information considered in the self-assessment process includes,

internal and external verification reports, observations, and internal audits. An effective team meeting involving all of the tutors and regional training co-ordinators was held to consider each key question in the 'Common Inspection Framework'. The company's second self-assessment report was produced in December 2004 to fit in with the business cycle. The next self-assessment report will be produced in the summer months to better mirror the training cycle and to support improvements to the training programmes. The self-assessment report is a self-critical document and has accurately identified most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, and a development plan has been developed.

48. A sampling strategy for internal verification has been developed. However, there is no overall plan to ensure the different NVQ units, assessors and the different methods of collecting evidence are sampled in accordance with this strategy. Some sampling plans exist for full-time assessors but not for all the part-time assessors on different sites. Insufficient internal verification is carried out through observation of assessments and learners' interviews. Most internal verification is carried out when the learners have completed their portfolios. Internal verification has failed to identify some of the issues relating to assessment practices. There are over 70 assessors, of whom 12 are also internal verifiers. Three assessors are full time and the rest are part time. Assessors have started to update their skills to the new assessor standards and learn about the new engineering NVQs. Currently, 56 per cent of assessors have attended the two-day training provided by the awarding body. Two standardisation meetings have been held at Tipton to introduce the assessor and verifier procedures and to review some learners' portfolios. Some part-time work-based assessors have not attended any standardisation meetings. A newsletter has been introduced recently to inform assessors of the changes and developments.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Mechanical engineering</i>		
- Other government-funded provision	79	2
- Apprenticeships for young people	66	2

Mechanical engineering

Strengths

- high numbers of learners remaining in training
- very good progress through the apprenticeship framework
- broad range of additional qualifications achieved
- good off-the-job training
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- weak key skills training arrangements for pipe-fitter apprentices
- poor assessment practices for some learners
- insufficient equal opportunities awareness by staff and adult learners

Achievement and standards

49. There are high numbers of learners who remain in training. Of the 2003-04 learners intake, 81 per cent remain in learning, and 87 per cent of learners who started apprenticeships in 2004-05 are still in learning. The retention rates for learners following NVQ programmes are also high. In 2002-03, before the introduction of apprenticeships, 98 per cent of learners were retained, and for NVQ programmes in 2003-04, 77 per cent were retained. All learners on NVQ programmes who started in 2004-05 remain in training.

50. Apprentices make good progress and achieve well. Achievement of the NVQ at level 2 is very high and well above the national average. Eighty-one per cent of apprentices recruited during 2003-04 completed the NVQ at level 2 in the first year. The remaining 19 per cent of those learners have completed their portfolios and are awaiting external verification. Achievement of the key skills qualification is particularly good for the learners on welding and steel erection programmes, with 100 per cent completing the qualification. For all apprenticeship programmes, achievement of the key skills element of the framework is 88 per cent during the first year.

51. The arrangements for key skills training for the pipe-fitting apprentices, however, are weak. These apprentices are progressing more slowly towards the key skills qualification than their welding and erecting counterparts. A subcontracted further education college delivers key skills training to these learners at the Tipton training centre. Arrangements for the provision of resources are clearly defined by service level agreements between the company and the subcontractor, but Mitsui Babcock has failed to monitor the subcontractor's performance effectively. Learners on this programme are making slow progress towards achieving key skills by the target date.

52. At 88 per cent, the learners' achievement of the technical certificate is good. The remaining 12 per cent are on target to achieve the certificate by July 2005. The overall achievement rates for the learners on NVQ-only programmes are satisfactory. For those learners who started in 2002-03, achievement is good at 74 per cent. However, NVQ achievement for those learners who started in 2003-04 currently stands at only 42 per cent, although 39 per cent of the intake is still in training. Reduction in available contracted work during the planned programme duration has reduced opportunities for learners to progress towards NVQ goals.

53. The company has effective strategies to encourage learners to progress. For example, welders are required to achieve two coded welding certificates before they are allowed into the workplace, and rates of pay for all learners are linked to the achievement of qualifications.

54. Learners are achieving a broad range of additional qualifications. The apprentices complete the NVQ at level 2 as part of the company's strategy for skills development, although this qualification is not part of the apprenticeship framework. Learners also gain lift truck licences where applicable, and health and safety qualifications. Apprentices on the welding programmes complete between two and six coded welder qualifications. These higher-level qualifications are not mandatory for the apprenticeship framework but are an employer requirement.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships																
	2004-05		2003-04													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	46		32													
Retained*	0		0													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	40		26													

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Other government funded																
	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	18		109		62											
Retained*	0		85		61											
Successfully completed	0		35		46											
Still in training	18		49		12											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

55. Off-the-job training for learners is well planned and is of high quality. At the training centre in Tipton, tutors use their wide industrial experience effectively to impart knowledge and skills to the learners. The learners acquire understanding of job requirements quickly and they complete a series of well-designed tasks to help them develop the basic engineering skills required. Teaching staff monitor learners' progress closely. Learners are not allowed to progress onto more difficult exercises until they can demonstrate a satisfactory level of proficiency in each task.

56. The management and organisation of on-site training is good and training plans are developed immediately the learners arrive to take up jobs. Appropriate tasks to meet learners' needs are selected in most instances, in spite of some learners' progress records not always being forwarded to sites on time. A suitable range of work is available on sites for most learners to achieve competence. Learners are relocated when sites are identified that cannot provide the range of work needed.

57. Practical tasks are completed in workshops that are equipped with a satisfactory range of industry-specific equipment. In some instances the company is making significant investment in developing training resources that clearly match those used in the workplace. For example, the steel erection department is in the process of building a training frame that will allow the learners to experience the differing techniques associated with the erection of steel structures. There is also a facility available to the training department for the non-destructive testing of the learners' welded work, including the use of X-ray facilities. The training staff and workplace supervisors are highly qualified and experienced.

58. The company has provided one subcontracted college with a wide range of workshop equipment that clearly matches equipment used in the workplace. This supports the learners effectively in the transition from off-the-job to on-the-job activities.

59. Assessment practice during on-the-job training for some learners has been poor. Little assessment by direct observation has taken place. Assessors rely heavily on witness

testimony when making assessment decisions. Work-based assessors have other workplace duties. The time made available for assessment is insufficient. Internal verifiers have failed to identify this poor practice. There have been significant changes to the qualification and awarding body documents. These now require more recording of direct observations by assessors. The company has taken steps to improve the process further by recruiting three full-time assessors to better co-ordinate on-site assessment. It is holding a series of meetings to better inform workplace supervisors of good assessment practice. The effect of these initiatives has yet to be assessed.

60. Programmes offered to learners satisfactorily meet their aspirations and employers' needs. During the first four weeks on the programme, learners experience a range of activities from all programmes offered within the company. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their respective choice of career and are supported well by their employer. Learners and employers frequently discuss any concerns they may have during this time. Where necessary, this results in the provision of alternative learning programmes.

61. There is good support for learners. Learners work under the supervision of experienced tradespeople, who have good practical and technical knowledge. Pastoral support is good and the topics relating to gambling, drugs, alcohol and sexual health are dealt with. Learners who have experienced difficulties with some of the workshop tasks have received extra individual tuition from the staff. The learners are given the telephone numbers of the tutors and are encouraged to contact them if they have any problems. The company provides accommodation for the learners while they are at the training centre or the college. They routinely assist them with travel expenses for home visits. During on-the-job training, the company assists learners in finding suitable accommodation. A 24-hour counselling support helpline is available to all of its employees and learners. Learners comment positively on the support provided.

62. Learners participate in effective initial assessment of vocational aptitude before starting training. The tests identify well the potential strengths and weaknesses in the learners' aptitudes. Learners are tested for mechanical comprehension and engage in a broad range of practical tests. These include pipefitting and welding exercises. For potential recruits to the steel erection programme, a climbing exercise is routinely used to assess their tolerance of heights. Results are used effectively to help develop individual learning plans and goals.

63. The subcontracting colleges supervise online assessment tests for literacy and numeracy for learners and deliver any support needed. Written tests are frequently used to supplement the online testing. The diagnostic results determine the learners' support requirements effectively. Key skills assignments for number and communications are differentiated to meet the needs of learners and are written in an engineering context.

Leadership and management

64. Learners have a review of progress before moving to working sites. Some learners on steel erection programmes have insufficient access to on-site assessment. There are good links between the on- and off-the-job training for welders.

65. The company has an effective staff development programme. Annual appraisals take place where targets and objectives are set. Staff are encouraged to participate in a wide range of personal development activities.

66. Communication within the company is satisfactory. All staff and learners can easily access information relating to NVQ programmes. The senior tutors hold a fortnightly meeting to discuss learners' progress and achievement.

67. There is insufficient awareness by staff of equal opportunities policies and practices. Apprentices have a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities and it is adequately reinforced during progress reviews. Adult learners do not have the same level of awareness, and progress reviews completed with adults do not reinforce equality of opportunity adequately. Workplace supervisors and lead assessors are not suitably aware of policies and legislation relating to equality of opportunity. Little formal training has taken place for these staff.

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Management - Work-based learning for adults	28	3

Management*Strengths*

- good achievement by management learners
- good commitment to continuing professional development for learners and staff

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough induction for management learners
- no arrangements for formal review of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

68. Achievement for adult learners on the management NVQ at level 3 programme is good. To date, 60 per cent of the first intake of learners who started in 2002-03 have achieved a full NVQ, and 28 per cent of that intake still remain in learning and are yet to achieve. Ninety-two per cent of learners for 2002-03 were retained on the programme. Forty-four per cent of learners from the 2003-04 intake working towards the NVQ at level 3 have achieved the qualification. All learners from this intake have achieved their primary learning goal or are still working towards it. Two NVQ at level 4 learners who enrolled in 2003-04 are still progressing towards the qualification. Rates of progress towards learning goals for learners based in the Tipton training centre are better than those for learners based in sites across the country. The Tipton site offers a range work experiences used to evidence management skills within a single environment. Relocation of learners to work sites in response to client demands on the company has a disruptive effect upon the planning of learning and assessment.

69. Learners have wide experience of working within the industry and many have worked for the company for a considerable time, up to 20 years in some cases. They use this experience well in their management roles and carry out roles of responsibility effectively. They are self-motivated to achieve in their learning and they manage their learning programmes effectively in collaboration with their workplace supervisors and work-based assessors. Learners relate their everyday tasks to the requirements of the NVQ programme in order to gather evidence of competences. This is especially the case when managing people and resources, collecting, using and disseminating information, and completing work tasks through team-building activities. The skills and knowledge learnt on the ECITB's SMTDS have assisted learners in carrying out their duties.

70. Many learners on the management programme have achieved qualifications additional to the NVQ as part of their training programme. Learning is enriched through the achievement of a nationally recognised supervisory management certificate, the full SMTDS certificate or modules towards it, as well as gaining the health and safety certificates, and assessor and verifier qualifications.

71. Learners contribute to the effective running of the workplace and this includes some learners being involved in the 'tender' of business to ensure the job security of many other employees. All learners speak very highly of the company and are committed to gaining more contracts.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Other government funded																
	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10		18		25											
Retained*	0		13		23											
Successfully completed	0		7		15											
Still in training	10		11		7											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

72. The company has a good strategy for the delivery of management training and is implementing plans to increase the numbers of on-site assessors and verifiers to support the NVQ management programmes. During the first phase of this strategy, management programmes have been delivered by a small team of assessors and verifiers co-ordinated by managers at the Tipton training centre. However, greater emphasis is being placed upon the importance of training established learners and those who have completed their NVQ programme to train as on-site assessors. This is proving successful as some of the management learners have achieved, or are working towards, their assessor qualification. Some key personnel at regional level engaged in learning programmes have qualified as internal verifiers. Outcomes of the company's strategies are to put learners who have completed their courses into positions where they can most effectively advise and support new learners.

73. There are adequate resources to deliver NVQ programmes effectively, including sufficient numbers of assessors and verifiers to support learners. Technology is being used to communicate feedback from the Tipton training centre to the remote sites across the company. The intranet is fairly new, with a website for training and development which assessors and learners can access. Some learners have used this site, but others

have not and do not fully understand how it works. Generally, learners get good on-site support from their workplace supervisors and learning is integrated effectively with work tasks. Learners are enabled to progress at a rate suited to their aspirations and needs.

74. Induction for management learners is insufficiently thorough and does not give full recognition of learners' prior learning and achievement. In many cases, higher-level qualifications held by learners are not discussed during the induction. Mitsui Babcock places great importance on enabling all supervisors and managers to achieve the engineering construction industry 'gold card'. The gold card scheme is an initiative to improve and promote the status of site supervision and is issued by the ECITB for employees successfully demonstrating competence by completing the ECITB's NVQ at level 3 management course. This has resulted in the placement of learners with level 4 qualifications on level 3 programmes, which some of them feel are not sufficiently challenging.

75. The use of induction materials is not consistent for all learners. For example, not all learners receive and sign the terms of training agreement document. Few management learners have completed a skills check which cross-references their current job tasks against the NVQ programme evidence criteria. Individual learning plans are not used during the induction process and a copy is not placed in the learners' portfolios. Consequently, management learners do not fully understand the significance of the individual learning plan. In its most recent self-assessment report, the company recognises the need to improve induction arrangements and it has identified actions to deal with this in its development action plan.

76. Learners on the management programmes are experienced and skilled workers and the company has not found it necessary to routinely assess learners for literacy and numeracy skills. Very few learners demonstrate inadequacies in skills for life and the company has not introduced formal arrangements for supporting skills for life on these programmes. Formally arranged sessions to review the progress of the learners on the management programme are not carried out, although some learners feel they would benefit from such sessions. Target-setting for management learners is weak. Often, set targets are too vague to provide clear guidance and they do not identify specific goals or the timescales for achievement.

Leadership and management

77. The company has a clear corporate mission to develop a highly skilled workforce, to create new business and ensure that it is considered the 'preferred provider' in the industry. The company has worked hard to respond to the national shortage of skilled engineers by providing well-trained supervisors and managers to support the acquisition of craft skills and qualifications in the workplace. Mitsui Babcock shows good commitment to continuing professional development for its learners and staff. The company ensures that staff are able to access training leading to qualifications required by the engineering industry. Through appraisal, learners can request or be recommended for training and development. Staff development planning is linked to the outcomes of annual staff appraisal, which results in employees being recommended for training by

mutual agreement in response to corporate needs and to those of the individual.

78. The understanding of equal opportunities by learners and staff is satisfactory. Learners know how to access the appeals, complaints and grievance procedures. Some of the learners are required to carry out these procedures in their daily duties with staff that they supervise. The self-assessment process is thorough and the report on this area of training was accurate and correctly identified weaknesses in the arrangements for learners' inductions.

79. Assessment practices are satisfactory, although arrangements for internal verification are incomplete. There are written procedures for internal verification, and a reallocation of internal verifiers and assessors to strengthen quality assurance of assessment has recently taken place. However, records produced for the auditing of verification practices provide unclear evidence, which makes monitoring of arrangements difficult. To date, there has been little planned observation of assessors as part of internal verification.