

INSPECTION REPORT

Babington Business College Limited

04 November 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnndirect** 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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Babington Business College Limited (Babington) is a private limited company which was established in 1974 and is based in Derby. The provider specialises in training in accounting, insurance and administration. Babington contracts with Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Staffordshire LSC and West Yorkshire LSC. The company has six training centres in Derby, Lichfield, Stoke, Dewsbury, Nottingham and Sheffield.

2. Babington is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in accounting. Currently, 425 apprentices and national vocational qualification (NVQ) learners are involved in training, most of whom are on accounting and administration programmes. Babington also provides programmes which are not LSC-funded for a small number of other learners who are involved in a range of accounting and administration programmes.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Babington's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The provision is good in accounting and finance and administration.

4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process is well managed and includes all relevant parties. The report identified effectively many of the provider's strengths and weaknesses. Babington collects feedback from stakeholders and identifies areas for improvement. Trends over time are taken into consideration appropriately and the overall evaluation is well managed. The self-assessment process did not focus sufficiently on specific programmes.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Babington has implemented improvement strategies effectively. The quality of the provision and the retention and achievement rates have improved overall since the February 2002 inspection.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR BABINGTON BUSINESS COLLEGE LIMITED:

- sustain and build on the good operational management
- continue to improve on the good retention rates
- improve apprenticeship framework completion rates in administration and eliminate slow progress
- continue to improve teaching and learning
- further develop strategies with learners and employers to promote equality and diversity
- continue to work towards providing equality of access to training
- further develop the strategy and provision for learners with additional learning needs
- focus more on the specific areas of learning in the self-assessment process

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Business administration and law			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Accounting and finance			
Apprenticeships for young people	284	2	
Administration			
Apprenticeships for young people	141	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. The contributory areas of accounting and finance, and administration were inspected. Work-based learning in business administration and law was graded overall and two contributory grades were awarded for accounting and insurance together and administration alone. Although no on-site visits took place before the main inspection, a great deal of contact and exchange of information took place which enabled evidence to be examined. A team of five inspectors based at Babington's head office in Derby carried out the inspection over four days, visiting all six training centres.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	30
Number of staff interviewed	35
Number of employers interviewed	17
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	7
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **Apprenticeship framework completion rates are very good in accounting, and continue to improve.** For example, between 2001 and 2005, 77 per cent of the advanced

apprentices who left had passed their professional examinations and had completed the apprenticeship framework. The achievement rate for the NVQ at level 4 in accounting is also very good. Eighty-five per cent of the learners who left between 2001 and 2005 achieved the qualification. Babington's learners have extremely good pass rates in the accounting professional examinations.

8. Retention rates are good and improving in all programmes. In accounting and insurance the retention rate has been very good for the past four years for all programmes, averaging 84 per cent. Retention rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices in administration are good, averaging 72 per cent, and the trend is improving.

9. Very effective skills development promotes learners' progression to higher-level programmes and to higher-level jobs. Learners develop good skills and apply them very effectively. Employers and supervisors provide good support for learning.

10. Completion rates for insurance apprenticeship frameworks have improved by 24 per cent in over two years and are continuing to improve. Pass rates in the professional insurance examinations are good.

11. In administration, the completion rate of apprenticeship frameworks is satisfactory overall, with scope for further improvement. For example between 2001 and 2003, 210 learners started apprenticeship programmes in administration and 53 per cent achieved the framework.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Business administration and law	0	4	3	0	7
Total	0	4	3	0	7

12. Learners receive good off-the-job training, including individual coaching and very effective small-group work. Particularly good use is made of the tutors' and the learners' work experiences to develop understanding and to relate background knowledge to different work contexts.

13. Well-organised training sessions are provided at the training centres for all learners each week. Attendance rates are very good and learners value these sessions. All sessions are planned well with clearly documented schemes of work, detailed lesson plans and well-designed notes and handouts.

14. Very effective action-planning motivates learners to progress and achieve. Action-planning takes place regularly and frequently in all programmes. Learners and employers have a clear understanding of learners' progress and what to do next.

15. Tutors are appropriately qualified and have up-to-date industry experience. All of them have attended courses to develop their teaching skills and improve the training days. During these training days learners carry out other useful activities. Tutors work well with learners to develop their portfolios and to plan activities. Learners who have literacy, numeracy and language needs receive additional support during these training days.

16. **Some learners have made slow progress towards completing administration apprenticeship frameworks**, although the circumstances which gave rise to the slow progress have now been resolved effectively by Babington.

Leadership and management

17. **Good operational management** maintains very good standards and continuous improvement. Babington has achieved CoVE status in accounting, which is its main programme area. Training centres are well run and timetables and schemes of work are well presented.

18. The leadership and management of training programmes is good. Tutors and assessors meet regularly to discuss learners' progress and to share good practice. Communications between training centres are effective and staff are fully involved in improvements.

19. **Staff development is particularly effective.** Staff are well supported to develop their professional and vocational skills.

20. Links with employers are very good and are used by Babington to ensure that learners receive an effective, safe and positive learning experience while in the workplace. A number of companies have used Babington as the main source of training in accounting for a number of years and highly value the provider's service.

21. **Babington manages and sustains good links with other stakeholders.** These links are used to respond effectively to the diverse needs of learners. Babington works effectively with local schools within the geographical regions served by its training centres.

22. Babington has an extensive network of contacts with external agencies. Participation in local and national forums, including the CoVE network, has been used successfully to share good practice.

23. **The provider's approach to equality of opportunity is good, with particularly effective reviews and actions to widen participation.** Careful analysis of data is successfully used to initiate actions to improve participation and achievement rates for minority groups.

24. Good-quality promotional materials are used to widen participation in training and to promote equality of opportunity. Particularly good use is made of learners' experiences and non-stereotypical case studies to promote work-based learning.

25. Babington makes a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. Employers' policies and practices are vetted satisfactorily every two years, although procedures for monitoring in the interim period are less well defined.

26. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities and a good understanding of specific topics such as harassment and bullying at work. Some learners do not fully understand these topics and the reinforcement of learners' understanding is not effective enough in some cases.

27. An appropriate disability statement clearly details the strategy and practical means for dealing with individuals with specific requirements. Access to four of the six training centres is unsuitable for learners with restricted mobility. However, appropriate alternative training arrangements are made for individual learners.

28. Since the February 2002 inspection, Babington has implemented particularly effective arrangements for quality improvements to training. Retention rates and framework completion rates have improved. Achievement rates for the NVQ at level 4 are now very good.

29. Observation of teaching and learning is carried out thoroughly to improve the quality of off-the-job training. Tutors receive good feedback and regular coaching. Learners' and employers' feedback is used to improve learning and the learners' experience.

30. The self-assessment report was updated in August 2005 and inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses that it identified.

31. Internal verification is effective in raising the standards of programmes. Regular standardisation meetings are held to share good practice, and new assessors are well supported. Staff receive effective support in developing assessment and verification practice. Internal verification systems meet national awarding bodies' standards, although the sampling and observation plan is not fully comprehensive.

32. **A quality improvement framework is supported by a well-defined policy and a range of appropriate procedures.** The procedures cover most aspects of the learners' training programmes. Internal audits are effective. **However, the recently improved initial assessment process is not covered by quality assurance procedures.**

33. Babington's three-year development plan states the provider's strategic objectives and priorities in appropriate detail. Resources are managed effectively. Learning resources and accommodation are appropriate and all training centres are equipped to a good standard.

34. **Babington does not have sufficient arrangements to identify and support learners with dyslexia, or those with other individual learning needs.** Arrangements for such support are not sufficiently detailed to allow staff to provide it effectively.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good operational management
- particularly effective staff development
- good links with employers and other stakeholders
- very thorough review and actions to widen participation
- good arrangements for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient quality assurance of initial assessment

- insufficient arrangements for learners with dyslexia and for other individual learning needs

Business administration and law

Strengths

- very effective skills development
- very good apprenticeship framework completion rates in accounting and insurance
- good off-the-job training
- very effective action-planning for learners
- good and improving retention rates

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners in administration

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT BABINGTON BUSINESS COLLEGE LIMITED:

- very helpful and friendly staff
- good atmosphere
- 'half days at the college are very good'
- personal attention in small groups
- 'everything is explained very well'
- treated like adults
- very interesting and well-planned lessons
- 'because it's small you get good individual help'
- good success rates
- 'the course is very enjoyable'
- good information and feedback to work
- good visits at work
- 'I like the experience and practice that the NVQ gives me in my first job'
- 'I like the apprenticeship and I am now much better at communication'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK BABINGTON BUSINESS COLLEGE LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the sharing of information - there are too many handouts
- the facilities - there is no recreational area
- teaching methods - some teaching is rushed
- the speed of processing portfolios and certificates - this is sometimes slow
- the car parking facilities
- the access to food and drinks at the training centre

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good operational management
- particularly effective staff development
- good links with employers and other stakeholders
- very thorough review and actions to widen participation
- good arrangements for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient quality assurance of initial assessment
- insufficient arrangements for learners with dyslexia and for other individual learning needs

35. Good operational management maintains very good standards and continuous improvement. Babington has achieved CoVE status in accounting, its main programme area. The planning and organisation of training is very effective. Training centres are well managed and timetables and schemes of work are well presented. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Good use is made of data at all levels to improve performance. A comprehensive range of management information and reports is used regularly to help monitor performance against such targets as retention and achievement. Detailed summary reports are used well by managers and staff to monitor the performance of different training centres against key performance indicators.

36. Staff development is particularly effective. Staff are well supported in developing their professional and vocational skills. An annual learning plan is produced for the training and development needs of staff, and they attend a wide range of internal and external training courses. Babington supports staff financially for external training courses in personal and professional development. All staff can also apply for additional training at any time of the year. Emphasis is placed on training that will improve the learners' experiences. For example, Babington has carried out a significant amount of training to improve and develop teaching and learning and to increase the number of qualified teaching staff. Training centre managers have been trained in counselling techniques. This strength was identified in the most recent self-assessment report.

37. Babington establishes and maintains constructive and productive links with employers and other stakeholders. Working relationships with employers are very good and are used by Babington to ensure that learners receive an effective, safe and positive learning experience in the workplace. Companies regularly use Babington as a source for recruitment and respect the provider's judgement and skill in selection. Babington carries out a significant amount of work to ensure that employers understand their roles and that they are involved effectively in work-based learning. Some companies have used Babington as their main source of training in accounting for a number of years and value them highly.

38. The provider sustains good links with other stakeholders. These are used to respond flexibly to learners' needs. Babington works effectively with local schools in the geographical regions served by its training centres. The provider has participated in educational and training events, as well as in initiatives such as practice sessions for pupils to improve their interview techniques. Very good work is carried out in co-operation with the Connexions service to recruit young people to work-based learning programmes.

39. Babington has an extensive network of contacts with external agencies. The main contracts are well managed and relationships with funding bodies are good. Participation in local and national forums, including CoVE networks, has been used successfully to share good practice. Babington has involved itself in apprenticeship framework and NVQ developments at a national level. The provider pilots programme workbooks and is involved in drafting revised vocational standards. Aspects of this strength were identified in the most recent self-assessment report.

40. Babington's three-year development plan states the provider's strategic objectives and priorities in appropriate detail. The plan commits Babington to a strategy that consolidates the number of training centres and programmes offered in its current provision. Resources are managed effectively. Learning resources and accommodation are appropriate and all training centres are equipped to a good standard, with sufficient capacity to provide suitable learning environments. The replacement, updating and maintenance of equipment and learning resources is managed satisfactorily.

41. The provider does not have sufficient procedures to identify and support learners with dyslexia or those with other individual learning needs. The support for learners who have additional learning needs is not consistent throughout the company, nor are the arrangements defined in sufficient detail to enable staff to respond effectively in all cases.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

42. Babington's approach to equality of opportunity is good, with particularly effective reviews and actions to widen participation. Data relating to marketing, applications rates, recruitment, work placements, progress and achievement is analysed comprehensively. The results of this analysis form an integral part of the management team's evaluation of performance and provide the basis for measuring the effect of the equality of opportunity, diversity and widening participation plan. Specific actions are implemented to improve participation and achievement rates for minority groups.

43. Targets are set and have been exceeded for applications and participation by members of minority ethnic groups. Targets are set for individual training centres and managers take responsibility for co-ordinating and implementing the diversity action plan with staff and learners. Some success has been achieved in reducing the disparity in the retention and achievement rates for minority ethnic groups when compared with mainstream groups. However, a small disparity remains and Babington is keen to achieve parity. Further actions have now been implemented, such as additional support with interview skills, and more support to help with individual progress and unit achievement rates.

44. Good-quality promotional materials are produced to widen participation and to promote equality of opportunity. Particularly good use is made of learners' experiences and non-stereotypical case studies to promote work-based learning. A DVD has recently been produced in three languages which is aimed at school leavers and parents. Highly

appropriate guidance booklets for employers, including the business case for diversity, are used by staff to raise awareness with employers. Advice cards and other materials are used effectively to reinforce understanding with employers and learners.

45. Babington makes a strong commitment to equality of opportunity through strategic statements, its policy and procedures for equality of opportunity and its disability statement. The diversity action plan and promotional activities and investment in marketing materials also support this commitment. Employers' policies and practices are vetted every two years, although procedures for monitoring in the interim period are less well defined. The provider has effective partnerships with education, voluntary and other statutory services. A diverse range of learners is reached through these partnerships, although some obstacles to learning remain due to entry requirements. The staff training programme includes regular awareness sessions, with a good use of case studies to illustrate harassment issues. Complaints are dealt with satisfactorily, but actions taken and conclusions are not recorded and the complaints policy and supporting procedures are not clearly specified for use by staff and learners.

46. Learners are briefed appropriately at induction about equal opportunities, and they have further sessions during off-the-job training. Their understanding of the issues is checked by a questionnaire. Most learners achieve an appropriate understanding of their rights and responsibilities and a good understanding of specific topics such as harassment and bullying at work. However, some learners do not fully understand these matters and the reinforcement of learning is not effective in some cases. Regular progress reviews check on the health, safety and welfare of individuals, but the reviews are not used to reinforce or check learners' understanding of equal opportunities and related matters. Babington has identified the need to recruit a more diverse staff team, but has not developed an appropriate recruitment strategy.

47. Babington's disability statement states clearly the strategy and practical means for dealing with individuals with specific requirements. Although the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is not referred to specifically, the terms of the statement fulfil the main requirements of the Act. However, access to four of the six training centres is unsuitable for learners with restricted mobility. Appropriate, alternative training arrangements are made for individual learners.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

48. Since the February 2002 inspection, Babington has implemented particularly effective arrangements for quality improvements to training and achievements. These arrangements have been effective in improving retention rates and achieving good framework completion rates overall. Achievement levels for the NVQ at level 4 are very good.

49. A thorough observation of teaching and learning process is carried out to improve the quality of off-the-job training. Tutors receive good feedback and regular coaching. Lessons and schemes of work are reviewed and improved systematically. Staff are observed at least annually. New tutors are observed more often and receive good support throughout their probationary periods. Detailed records are made of all observations, and appropriate feedback is provided. Improvements made are monitored effectively to ensure that they are carried out to an appropriate standard.

50. Learners' views are used effectively in making judgements about the quality of

observed sessions. All tutors receive regular update sessions that focus on improving their teaching skills and provide a forum in which to share good practice. Babington's staff are encouraged to develop new ideas to improve the quality of training. They can all participate in a financial reward scheme by suggesting activities to improve the quality of off-the-job training. Feedback is used effectively in the annual course reviews, and the self-assessment process. Regular feedback from employers is used very effectively and identifies trends to assist the provider in planning new developments.

51. Since the February 2002 inspection, the link between self-assessment and quality improvement has improved significantly. Self-assessment is now integrated with Babington's quality improvement processes. Particularly good use is made of the self-assessment report's development plan to monitor progress and to identify priorities for quality improvement at Babington's training centres. During the self-assessment process a wide range of data was used to contribute to the overall evaluation of the quality of provision. Staff and most stakeholders were involved appropriately in the process. A newsletter is used to tell learners and employers about the outcomes of the self-assessment process.

52. Internal verification is effective in raising the quality of the programmes. Babington holds regular standardisation meetings to share good practice. New assessors are well supported. Notes of meetings are detailed and shared with any assessors unable to attend. Staff training supports the staff in developing their assessment and verification practice. The internal verification systems meet the standards of the national awarding bodies, although the sampling and observation plan is not fully comprehensive.

53. The sixth self-assessment report was produced in December 2004. This was updated in August 2005, before the inspection. Inspectors generally agreed with the conclusions of the self-assessment and with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by Babington. However, the report does not focus on specific programme areas and the improvements necessary in those areas.

54. A quality assurance framework is supported by a well-defined policy and range of appropriate procedures. The arrangements cover most aspects of the learners' training programme. Internal audits are effective. However, the recently improved initial assessment process is not covered by a quality assurance procedure. There is an over-reliance on informal processes and procedures to ensure continuous quality improvement of initial assessment. Some inconsistencies are evident, although there is no evidence that this has had any effect on the learners.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration and law

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance Apprenticeships for young people	284	2
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	141	2

55. Babington offers apprenticeships and NVQ training in administration, accounting and insurance. It is a CoVE in accounting. There are 425 work-based learners in total.

56. Most learners are employed. They work in a variety of organisations which include accounting practices and offices in industry, insurance companies, and local councils. Learners are able to join the apprenticeship programme at any time of the year. Recruitment is by referrals from Connexions and schools, contacts from employers and personal referrals as a result of advertising campaigns.

57. Most learners attend weekly off-the-job training in one of the training centres. A few insurance learners are not able to access off-the-job training, so it is provided in their workplaces. A team of assessor/monitors visits the learners in the workplace at least every six weeks to carry out progress reviews with the learner and the workplace supervisor. Assessment is carried out in the workplace and in the training centre.

Strengths

- very effective skills development
- very good apprenticeship framework completion rates in accounting and insurance
- good off-the-job training
- very effective action-planning for learners
- good and improving retention rates

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners in administration

Achievement and standards

58. Very effective skills development contributes towards learners' progression to higher-level programmes and to higher-level jobs. In accounting and insurance, learners make good progress in the three levels of the qualification, and towards professional qualifications. In administration, learners develop good skills and apply them very effectively. Employers and supervisors provide good support for learning. Tutors use their workplace visits well to co-ordinate learning in the workplace with off-the-job training. Employers recognise the benefits of the apprenticeship programme and make good use of learners' new knowledge and skills by giving them added responsibilities. In some companies, ex-learners study for professional accounting qualifications after completing

apprenticeships with Babington. One company, which currently employs an apprentice who is being trained by Babington, has a supervisor and a partner in the firm who are ex-apprentices of Babington.

59. Learners develop a very good level of workplace skills, particularly in accounting. The learners acquire the ability, skills and confidence to move from basic book-keeping duties to preparing taxation computations, the accounts of limited companies, and attending clients' premises as part of an audit team. Learners also have opportunities to acquire additional qualifications which include payroll, higher-level and additional key skills, and more units of the NVQ at level 4. All level 4 learners work for at least one extra unit in cash management, and some study for the auditing unit as well, if it is relevant to their workplace. Some learners have been promoted in their workplaces after a relatively short time. Learners are encouraged to become advanced apprentices, some of whom go on to acquire further professional qualifications.

60. Achievement rates are good and improving overall. Apprenticeship framework completion rates are very good in accounting and insurance. Completion rates have been consistently good in accounting for a number of years. For example, in 2002-03, 228 learners began programmes and 78 per cent of those learners achieved their main goals. This included an 80 per cent completion rate for advanced apprentices, a 69 per cent rate for apprentices and an 85 per cent achievement rate for level 4 NVQ learners. Pass rates in the external professional examinations are very good. Learners consistently achieve well above the national average in every examination. In the most recent examinations, all the learners were successful. The self-assessment report identified good achievement levels as a strength.

61. In administration, the completion of apprenticeship frameworks is satisfactory overall, with scope for further improvement. The rate of framework completions for administration apprentices dropped in 2002-03 to 43 per cent from 58 per cent, although a significant number of learners stayed on programme and completed the NVQ at level 2. However, the overall rates are satisfactory. Between 2001 and 2003, 210 learners began apprenticeship programmes in administration and 53 per cent completed the full apprenticeship framework.

62. Retention rates are good and improving for all programmes. The self-assessment report identified this strength. In accounting, the retention rate has been very good for the past four years, ranging from 74 per cent to 91 per cent in the apprenticeship programmes. The rate is consistently over 84 per cent in the level 4 NVQ programme. In insurance, the retention rate has improved in recent years to 70 per cent in 2003, and for learners who began their two-year programme in 2004, figures at the time of the inspection indicate a further improvement. Retention rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices in administration are good and improving.

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

Inspection:

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	22		96		79		99		83	100						
Retained*	22		88		59		81		60	72						
Successfully completed	0		40		43		75		55	66						
Still in learning	22		48		16		5		0	0						

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	41		214		223		204		198	100						
Retained*	41		188		149		129		142	72						
Successfully completed	0		30		88		108		116	59						
Still in learning	41		158		56		2		0	0						

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	30		46		69		68		33	100						
Retained*	30		45		58		61		30	91						
Successfully completed	0		9		48		58		28	85						
Still in learning	30		36		10		1		0	0						

*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

The quality of provision

63. Learners receive good off-the-job training, including individual coaching and very effective small-group work. Particularly good use is made of the tutors' and the learners' work experiences to develop understanding and to relate background knowledge to different work contexts. Well-organised training sessions are provided for all learners each week at the training centres. Attendance rates are very good and learners value these sessions. All sessions are planned well, with clearly documented schemes of work, detailed lesson plans and well-designed tutor handouts. Four of the seven sessions observed during the inspection were graded good, and three were satisfactory. A variety of teaching and learning strategies are used to involve, stimulate and motivate the learners. However, information technology is not used sufficiently in insurance sessions. The content of some sessions is restricted. A good range of textbooks is available to learners. Some of the training sessions are very lively and interactive, and involve all the learners. However, there are instances of training sessions which are more tutor centered, and although satisfactory,

these sessions did not produce the levels of variety and interest evident in other sessions.

64. Very effective action-planning motivates learners to progress and achieve their goals. Action-planning takes place regularly and frequently in all programmes. Learners and employers have a clear view of progress and what to do next. The short-term action plans are detailed and provide accurate information for the learner and the employer about the standard required for each unit. Plans are reviewed and amended frequently as the learner progresses. The employers receive a copy of these reviews which enable them to support the learner by adapting the learner's role to the requirements of the NVQ standards. Learners are motivated by having their units accredited throughout their programmes. Assessment practices are thorough and learners receive constructive feedback.

65. Tutors are appropriately qualified and have up-to-date industry experience. They have all attended courses to develop their teaching skills. Learners carry out other useful activities during training days. They work with their tutors to develop their portfolios and to plan activities. Learners who have literacy, numeracy and other needs receive additional support during these training days. Tutors who provide off-the-job training liaise well with those who visit learners in their workplaces. Learners and their supervisors understand the relationships between on- and off-the-job training, and these activities are well co-ordinated. Key skills training is integrated effectively into learners' vocational work. The initial assessment of learners' key skills is used to identify support needs. Action plans and support are provided and reviewed regularly.

66. A number of learners have made slow progress towards completion of their administration programmes, although the circumstances which gave rise to the slow progress have now been resolved by Babington. A significant number of leavers were on the administration apprenticeship programme for over 12 months and achieved the NVQ but did not complete their frameworks during this period. In some cases in the past, unsatisfactory programme planning, insufficient visits to the workplace, delays in processing completed portfolios, and staff absences, contributed to delays in progression.

Leadership and management

67. Tutors and assessors meet regularly to discuss learners' progress, to standardise approaches and to share good practice. Communications between training centres are effective and staff are well informed. Good practice is shared well, and staff are fully involved in making improvements. A consistent approach to programme design and delivery is employed in all training centres. Staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of learners. Suitable training and regular discussions at staff meetings ensure that equality, diversity and widening participation are considered appropriately by staff.

68. The training centres are well resourced, although some staff do not use the full range of resources available to them and staff absences have caused problems in some cases. Access is a problem for learners with limited mobility, in most of the training centres. This problem has been recognised by Babington and flexible arrangements are made to resolve the situation. Inspectors' findings matched many of those in the self-assessment report and the grade given by inspectors for this area of learning was the same as that given in the self-assessment report. Internal verification is satisfactory overall. However, not all assessors' assessment practice is observed regularly enough, and there is not always a full evaluation of assessment methods.

