

# The Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre (Thatcham)

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**Inspection date**

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**Inspection number**

318329

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

## Description of the provider

1. The Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre (Thatcham) is a unique not-for-profit automotive repair research centre, and is a company limited by guarantee. Established in 1969, it employs 134 staff and is financed by a members' levy and the sales of research material and information.
2. In 2002, the number of apprentice learners in training at the Centre was 30 and currently this number has increased to 291 in workplaces across England. 136 of these learners are apprentices and 155 are advanced apprentices. Of these learners, 4.5% are from a minority ethnic background and 2.5% are female. All funded learners are registered with Thames Valley LSC. The centre also offers full-cost adult training outside the scope of this inspection.
3. The apprenticeship programme is part of the operations department, led by a chief operating officer. A training centre manager runs the centre with a staff of 14 full-time and two contract staff, including an apprentice team leader. An internal verifier and a team of six assessors approve workplaces, review progress and offer mentor training. Seven on-site apprentice instructors provide technical certificate training and some key skills elements.
4. Thatcham, together with East Berkshire College, was awarded Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in June 2005. In November 2007, Thatcham was awarded the New Standard qualification for engagement with employers.

## Summary of grades awarded

<b>Effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Achievement and standards</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Equality of opportunity</b>	<b>Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Sector subject area

<b>Engineering and manufacturing technologies</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
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## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

#### Good: Grade 2

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, and the quality of the vehicle body and paint operations provision are good. The organisation's leadership and management and arrangements for quality improvement are good. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The organisation's response to *Every Child Matters* outcomes is good.

### Capacity to improve

#### Good: Grade 2

6. The provider's capacity to improve is good. In a planned expansion of the whole company, the focus on apprentice training has been good. In an unsettled period, Thatcham has restructured its staffing to support its apprenticeship programme. Very high success rates, the quality of provision overall and leadership and management are judged by the inspection team to be key strengths. Thatcham works well with partners and employers to develop the quality of its apprentice programme.
7. Arrangements for quality improvement are good and are increasingly having impact on the quality of the learner experience. Thatcham has accurately identified its areas for improvement in its self-assessment report. A thorough and clear quality assurance system is now in place. The standard of all key learning processes is monitored, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Thatcham has sought and acted upon external help in improving the quality of its provision. A significant rise in timely achievement has occurred recently. The achievement of frameworks to half way through the current contract year, show a continuing upward trend.
8. The quality of training is good. Exceptionally good facilities in the Thatcham apprentice centre have been extended and improved to provide an outstanding learning environment. Good development opportunities are available to ensure staff are aware of the latest developments in paint and body repair. Regular internal staff meetings take place to share information and good practice. Thatcham's use of management information for self-assessment is good. A newly established system to monitor learner progress is accessible to all staff, and is increasingly providing information that motivates learners to complete their training at a good pace.
9. This is Thatcham's first inspection and its third self-assessment report. Steps taken to improve provision are good. Quality improvement plans are sound. Staff benchmark performance against other providers and they are responsive to ideas for improvement from staff and learners.
10. The self-assessment process is good. Effective meetings include stakeholders. The views of staff and learners are taken into account and the recent self-assessment report is honest and detailed. It includes judgements on all aspects of provision and its identification of key strengths and areas for improvement is broadly in line with the findings of the inspection team.

## Key strengths

- High success rates for advanced apprentices
- Good development of learners' skills
- Excellent resources for off-the-job training
- Good on and off-the-job training
- Good support for learners
- Strong leadership
- Good operational management
- Highly effective partnership working

## Key areas for improvement

- Progress reviews
- Internal verification process
- Effectiveness of management information to monitor apprentice progress
- Reinforcement of equality of opportunity

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

#### Good: Grade 2

11. Overall success rates on advanced apprenticeship programmes have significantly improved since 2005 when overall success rates were 62% against the national framework rate of 48%. Success rates for advanced apprenticeships are now outstanding at 81.3% for 2006/07 in comparison with the national average of 57.7%. In year success rates show a continuing improvement trend.
12. Thatcham's apprentice programme is new, and progress for these learners is good. Only seven learners are expected to complete by the end of 2008 but they are on target to achieve their qualification. The provider does not analyse the performance of minority groups.
13. Key skills achievement is satisfactory. The provider identified the timely completion of portfolios as an area for improvement in its self-assessment report. Effective implementation of development action plans have contributed to recent improvements in framework achievement. Thatcham provides learners with the opportunity to be supported in gaining additional industry qualifications such as the automotive technician accreditation.
14. The standard of learners' practical work is good. Learners contribute effectively at the workplace and produce work of a commercial standard. They develop a wide range of practical skills and most learners comment positively on their significant acquisition of skills since leaving school.
15. Attendance at Thatcham is excellent, with many sessions recording 100% attendance. Health and safety at Thatcham and in the workplace is actively promoted. The provider has developed effective strategies to embrace the *Every Child Matters* outcomes in health, safety, enjoyment and achievement.

### Quality of provision

#### Good: Grade 2

16. Off-the-job training is carried out on a block-release basis. Thatcham has state of the art workshops equipped to a very high standard and boasts advanced vehicle repair and refinishing systems. Equipment is updated and replaced on a regular basis to embrace advancements in automotive technology. Classrooms are well furnished creating an environment conducive to learning. A range of modern interactive teaching aids support and stimulate learning. Staff are occupationally competent, well qualified and undergo regular staff development to ensure they keep up to date with modern technology.
17. Resources in the workplace are good with all workshops having industry standard paint and body repair systems which enable learners to develop their skills when undertaking a wide range of repairs to modern vehicles. Over 80% of learning sessions observed were judged to be good. Strategies for learning employed by tutors encompass a wide range of imaginative teaching methods that engage learners and support learning.



18. Training in the workplace is supported by skilled technicians who monitor and provide confirmation of the development of learners' skills that contribute towards the NVQ qualification. Assessment is carried out on a regular basis, in the workplace, by skilled assessors who accurately record and update learners' monitoring records. Identification of learners' additional support needs is satisfactory. Where support is required, this is provided at Thatcham from occupationally qualified staff. However, supervisors in the workplace have insufficient knowledge of the structure or content of the learners' NVQ qualification.
19. The quality of some progress reviews is weak. Many reviews are not tripartite, with employers and learners being seen separately. Insufficient consideration is taken of the views of the apprentice's workplace supervisor. Some supervisors take no active role in the review process and are therefore unable to contribute effectively towards their learner's training. Action planning is weak, insufficiently detailed and does not include specific, timely targets. In addition, some aspects of equality of opportunity are not sufficiently reinforced in the workplace.
20. Through the self-assessment process, the provider recognised that its internal verification processes were ineffective. The internal verification process was subsequently revised and staff changes made to manage improvement plans. The team is well motivated and enthusiastic to respond to change. The newly introduced monitoring system is assisting in improving the rate of learner progress. However, some learners are making slow progress and not enough work is done to assess their performance in the workplace.
21. Programmes and work-placements meet employer needs. They invest readily in the future of learners to ensure that skilled technicians are available to meet projected industry demand. Learners appreciate the employment opportunities given to them and respond positively to the commitment and support shown by their employers. While on block release at Thatcham, learners are encouraged to take part in a range of enrichment activities which are generally organised by the training provider staff. Activities include 5 a side football, bowling and golf.
22. Arrangements to provide advice, guidance and support are good overall. Learners receive particularly good support throughout their entire training programme from both Thatcham and their employers. Employers and mentors offer effective guidance and support to learners in the workplace. Learners are prepared to discuss issues of a sensitive and personal nature with Thatcham staff and many have been successfully retained through the activities of support staff. Whilst attending on their block release training programme, Thatcham has a dedicated member of staff to monitor and support the pastoral and welfare aspects of learners staying in local accommodation. At the training centre, the provider has established a well equipped common room for learners to socialise and relax in during breaks. Learners are provided with satisfactory advice and guidance through Thatcham and its links with a local college (East Berkshire College) and employers.

## **Leadership and management**

**Good: Grade 2**

**Equality of opportunity**

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

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23. Leadership and management are good. Business planning is effective. All departments have their own targets and performance is monitored rigorously. Staff are clear about their targets. There is good focus on the apprenticeship programme. The company values its apprentice training highly as it continues to position itself well to contribute to the growth and development of the sector. Thatcham's activities have broadened and expanded and the company has a high profile as an industry leader in raising standards. It achieves many coveted awards. Learners are motivated by their connection to Thatcham and the apprentice team is well led and highly motivated.
24. Operational management is good. Tutors in motor vehicle groups provide good management of the programme and focus sharply on the needs of learners. Communication with employers is regular and effective. Internal communications are good and the management structure enables staff to communicate informally and effectively with their managers. Meetings take place frequently and are effective. A suite of new or updated documents state clearly what is expected. Thatcham responds well to the learner and employer voice and new ideas are welcomed. Prompt action is taken when actions and improvements are identified. The management of resources is good and the apprentice programme represents very good value for money. Learners benefit from generous investment in facilities and equipment for training and recreation. Investment in new management information systems is having increasing benefit for planning and managing training. However, Thatcham has had some problems recently in producing accurate data on apprentice's progress. This was recognised as an area for improvement in the provider's self-assessment report. Arrangements to ensure high standards of health and safety are particularly thorough with learners having a good knowledge of regulations and best practice.
25. Partnership working is highly effective. Thatcham has strong links with employers and maintains good working relationships with them. It works in partnership with other prestigious companies providing a variety of advantages for learners. For example, Thatcham has good working relationships with equipment suppliers and increasingly it offers apprentices state of the art equipment. It works with four paint suppliers and has recently opened a new fourth paint booth. Thatcham shares good practice with and benchmarks its performance against a number of organisations. It is in its third year as a CoVE partner with East Berkshire College. Links with schools and careers services are good.
26. Staff development is satisfactory overall and professional training is good. A recent improvement is the introduction of two weeks annually for organisational training, with an entitlement to at least 40 hours of continued professional development. Training in child protection for work-based assessors is insufficient.
27. Arrangements for literacy and numeracy are satisfactory overall. Thatcham has a clear strategy in place. Training and individual support in key skills sessions on block training is very good. Key skills is recognised in the self-assessment report as a contributory factor in low timely achievement in previous years. Substantial progress has been made to improve the arrangements for providing key skills. A change of subcontractor has been beneficial with 85% of learners expressing high levels of satisfaction in feedback. However, training is not linked specifically to workplace learning and insufficient reinforcement of skills takes place.

28. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory overall. The self-assessment report agrees with this judgement. Much is done to promote equality from director level. There are a range of comprehensive policies that are supplied to learners in induction. However, these are not simplified, and learners have little understanding or recall of their content. In reviews, opportunities are missed to explore wider aspects of equality and diversity with learners. Training in equality of opportunity for staff is insufficient.
29. Thatcham have good arrangements to encourage social inclusion. Staff awards are made as a result of peer nomination. A welcoming Realisation Day for apprentices and their families introduces them to what Thatcham has to offer and assures them of the extent of the support they will be given. Thatcham focuses well on providing a good response to the *Every Child Matters* themes. Its contribution to education and social inclusion are good. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet with current government requirements.

## What learners like:

- Friendly and approachable trainers
- ‘Staff treat us like adults and with respect’
- Good ‘Realisation Day’ and induction
- Good training on and off job
- Using the newest equipment and the newest paints
- Good support from trainers
- Very strict health and safety regulations at work and in Thatcham

## What learners think could improve:

- More interest in my training from my employers
- More access to the wider activities in Thatcham
- Insufficient organised activities in the evenings and lunches on block training

## Annex

## Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by MIRRC (Thatcham) **2005/06 year to 2006/07**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced apprenticeships	05-06	overall	8	61.5%	54.2%	61.5%	44.4%
		timely	1	7.1%	27.2%	7.1%	34.1%
	06-07	overall	13	81.3%	57.7%	81.3%	64.2%
		timely	8	50%	37.4%	50%	42.7%

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'