



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in  
Babcock Training Limited

Report of an Inspection in  
April 2016

## Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

## Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning, on Leadership and management, and on the overall quality of professional and technical areas:

Current performance level	Previous performance level <sup>1</sup>
Outstanding	Outstanding
Very good	Very good
Good	Good
Important area(s) for improvement	Satisfactory
Requires significant improvement	Inadequate
Requires urgent improvement	Unsatisfactory

## Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

Overall effectiveness outcome	Previous performance level
The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Outstanding and very good
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Good
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection.	Satisfactory
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection.	Inadequate and unsatisfactory

<sup>1</sup> The ETI performance levels were revised with effect from the 1 September 2015.

<b>Key Performance Indicators and Definitions</b>	
<b>Retention</b>	The percentage of enrolments at week 4 of year one who completed their occupational training framework, measured over the full duration of their course.
<b>Achievement</b>	The percentage of trainees/apprentices who completed their occupational training framework and who fully achieved their framework qualification.
<b>Progression</b>	The percentage of successful completers who progressed to further/higher education/training or employment.

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## 1. Inspection method and evidence base

A team of seven inspectors and three associate assessors observed a total of 53 apprentices in 44 workplace training sessions. Inspectors visited 82 workplaces, and 174 apprentices were interviewed individually or in focus group meetings. The inspectors held discussions with the director of training, the operations manager, the regional manager, the national quality manager and head of quality, the programme development manager, the sales and accounts development advisor, vocational learning managers (VLMs), vocational learning advisors (VLAs), the essential skills co-ordinator and essential skills tutors, and the lead and internal verifiers across the professional and technical areas. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the apprentices' work and personal training plans, and the vocational learning advisors' and essential skills tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

The inspectors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people. The inspection included the opportunity for the apprentices to express their views on their training and learning experience by completing an online questionnaire prior to the inspection.

The questionnaire returns are low, however, from those apprentices who responded, nearly all of them are positive about their learning programme and their training experiences.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Learners	400	49	12%	5

## 2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the Achievements and standards;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of Provision for training and learning; and
- the quality of the Leadership and management of the organisation.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation and which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Further Education and Work-based Learning* <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/iqrs-fe-and-work-based-learning-2015-2016.pdf>

## 3. Context

Babcock Training Limited (Babcock Training) is part of the Babcock International Group and is one of the largest providers of apprenticeship training in the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, it manages the delivery of its apprenticeship programmes from its regional office in Antrim, which was established in 2008. The regional office is managed by Babcock Training's operations manager for Northern Ireland and Scotland, and the regional manager for Northern Ireland. They are supported well by a team of 39 staff including vocational learning managers, vocational learning advisors, essential skills tutors, internal verifiers and other programme development and administrative staff. All of the apprenticeship provision is delivered in the workplace by the VLAs and essential skills tutors.

The organisation is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department)<sup>2</sup> to provide the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. At the time of the inspection, there were 702 apprentices on the programme, 350 at level 2 and 352 at level 3. Twenty eight of the apprentices were in active leisure learning and well-being, 11 at level 2 and 17 at level 3; 41 were in customer service, 20 at level 2 and 21 at level 3; 474 were in hospitality and catering, 247 at level 2 and 227 at level 3; and 159 were in retail, 72 at level 2, and 87 at level 3<sup>3</sup>. Just under one half (48%) of the apprentices were undertaking essential skills qualifications in literacy or numeracy as part of their apprenticeship programme.

Based on information provided by the organisation, 17 (2%) of the apprentices have an assessed and supported disability or additional learning support need, and appropriate support has been put in place to meet their individual needs. Sixty-eight (10%) of the apprentices have declared no formal qualifications on entry to their training programme. Around 41% of the apprentices entered the programme with four or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics or equivalent. Approximately 63% of the apprentices hold a GCSE qualification at grade C or better in English, and 58% of the apprentices hold a GCSE qualification at grade C or better in mathematics.

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Outstanding
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Very good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Outstanding

<b>Professional and technical areas performance levels</b>	
Active leisure, learning and wellbeing	Outstanding
Customer service	Outstanding
Essential skills	Very good
Hospitality and catering	Outstanding
Retail	Outstanding

#### Going well

- The outstanding quality of the strategic and operational leadership and management of the apprenticeship provision.
- The high quality of the curriculum provision which is tailored very well to match the individual training needs of the apprentices and the employers.

<sup>2</sup> The functions and services associated with delivery of the Department for Employment and Learning's Apprenticeships NI Programme transferred to the Department for the Economy on 9 May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The organisation also holds a contract to deliver apprenticeships in business and administration, health and social care, and motor industry but no apprentices were enrolled in these areas at the time of the inspection.

- The highly effective quality assurance processes in place to support ongoing improvements in the quality of the training provision, underpinned by a strong commitment from management and staff to the provision of a high quality learning experience for the apprentices.
- The very effective systems used to support the delivery of the training programmes and track and monitor the progress of the apprentices, which are underpinned by the use of robust data.
- The well experienced, committed and enthusiastic VLAs and essential skills tutors who work collaboratively as a team, and are provided with very good opportunities to undertake continuing professional development.
- The outstanding levels of employer engagement, including the excellent relationships and channels of communication established with them, their involvement in the training provision, and the processes in place to gather feedback on the quality of the workplace learning provision.
- The very good overall quality of the learning, teaching and training, including the effective use of an extensive range of very good quality learning resources to support the apprentices' learning.
- The outstanding quality of the care, guidance and support for the apprentices, including the provision in place to support their personal and social development, and the comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding.
- The high standards of work demonstrated by the apprentices, most of whom are progressing well in their learning across the professional and technical areas inspected and in the essential skills.
- The very good overall retention rate (80%) and the outstanding outcomes (100%) for those apprentices who complete their professional and technical programme, and the essential skills.
- The outstanding quality of the provision across all of the professional and technical areas inspected, and the very good quality of the provision for the essential skills.

#### **What does Babcock Training Limited need to do to improve?**

- Continue to refine the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in the professional and technical area of active leisure, learning and wellbeing and for the essential skills.

#### **5. Achievements and standards**

##### **The achievements and standards are outstanding**

Almost all of the apprentices are highly motivated and enthusiastic and they engage very well in their learning. They speak positively about their apprenticeship programmes and can demonstrate clearly and confidently, to a high standard, how their learning and training can be applied across the wide and varied range of job roles that they undertake.

Most of the apprentices demonstrate high levels of competence and are making very good progress in their learning and training, and in the further development of their professional and technical skills, knowledge and expertise. They use appropriate professional and technical terminology and language across the professional and technical areas inspected, and produce a range of both practical and written work which is, often, well above the standards required for their targeted qualifications.

Almost all of the employers interviewed are highly positive about the apprenticeship programmes. They consistently report that the apprentices' confidence, and personal, social and communication skills have improved significantly through their engagement on their training programmes and, not only do they improve their existing professional and technical skills and knowledge, but they are also developing a range of additional skills and competences to further support them in their job roles and in progression opportunities within the workplace. Numerous examples exist of how the apprentices' professional and technical training, and in a minority of cases how their essential skills training, supports them to take on additional responsibilities or to take advantage of internal or external promotion or career progression opportunities.

The employers are equally positive about the apprentices' essential skills experiences and on the positive impact this has on the tasks they undertake in the workplace. The standards achieved by the apprentices in their essential skills are mostly very good. Their standards of speaking and listening and the quality of most of their written work are very good or better.

Over the last three years, the overall retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is very good (80%). It is a key strength of the provision that all of those apprentices who complete their qualification achieve.

All of the apprentices who complete their essential skills training also achieve, and a significant minority of them achieve above the target level required by their apprenticeship framework.

## **6. Provision for learning**

### **The quality of the provision for learning is very good**

A well-considered curriculum is offered to the apprentices, targeting effectively the development of their professional and technical skills, essential skills, and their confidence and self-esteem. A structured programme of personal and social development is in place, including, for example, living and working together, equality and diversity, health and safety, e-safety and cyber security.

The VLAs effectively motivate, engage, and work hard to raise the self-confidence and expectations of all of the apprentices. They have developed highly supportive and productive working relationships with the apprentices and their employers. Almost all of the apprentices engage effectively and enthusiastically with their programme of learning and all of them report positively on their learning experiences.

The quality of the learning, teaching, and training observed was mainly very good. The professional and technical training is delivered to a consistently high standard across a diverse range of employers and commercial settings, and is a key strategic priority for the organisation. A range of high quality paper-based and on-line resources have been developed to support the apprentices. The quality of the learning and teaching observed in the essential skills is good or better. The essential skills provision is planned well to meet the needs of the apprentices and runs concurrently with the professional and technical training.



In the best practice, the learning and training sessions are characterised by thorough and coherent planning in collaboration with the apprentices and employers; a range of effective and creative teaching strategies are used which are matched imaginatively to the individual learning needs of the apprentices. The session content and assessment methods are at an appropriate level and differentiated to provide stretch and challenge in the apprentices' learning. The essential skills of literacy and numeracy are well contextualised and there is an appropriate focus on developing the apprentices' underpinning knowledge and independent study skills. Information and learning technology is also used well to support the apprentices and enhance their learning experiences.

In the minority of less effective learning and training sessions observed, the range of teaching approaches used are limited and in some instances assessment driven; the questioning strategies used do not sufficiently assess the apprentices' learning and understanding; and long term planning is under-developed. While there is evidence that a majority of the apprentices have accessed the significant bank of online resources, not enough of them, across the professional and technical areas, engage effectively in independent learning. In addition, almost all of the directed training is delivered on a one-to-one basis and consideration should be given to the development of more group learning sessions to increase peer learning opportunities for the apprentices.

The apprentices are kept very well informed about their progress, their personal training plans are working documents which reflect well their prior achievements and the progress being made by them in their learning. The monitoring, tracking and review processes are mostly robust and successfully engage and involve employers to inform the planning for the training delivery and the development of the apprentices' professional and technical skills and knowledge. In a small number of the reviews, the targets are not specific enough and the reviews focus too much on completion of units rather on the overall progress being made by the apprentices.

Employers are highly complementary about the quality of the learning, teaching and training provided and report that highly effective channels of communication have been established and the model of delivery is flexible to meet their business needs. The effective workplace mentor system also involves and keeps them well-informed about the progress being made by their apprentices.

The quality of the arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the apprentices is outstanding. The staff at all levels demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the pastoral care and welfare needs of the apprentices, in order that they can achieve to their full potential. There is a highly inclusive ethos, with relationships between the staff and apprentices based on mutual respect. The apprentices have very good access to an appropriate range of resources and support services. The structured induction processes, including the systems for identifying and meeting individual apprentice's support needs at an early stage in the programme are well-established and highly effective. The ongoing monitoring, tracking and review processes are comprehensive, track effectively the progress of the apprentices through their programme, and inform future planning.

Almost all of the responses from the online questionnaire and discussions with the apprentices were positive about the extent, quality and impact of the support they receive. While formal records show that only a small number of apprentices enter the programme with complex barriers to progression, apprentices state that the VLAs help them to remain motivated to stay on their programme through, for example, their flexibility in approach, their willingness to organise and attend early meetings with apprentices who work night shifts to support their training needs and progress, signposting apprentices to support agencies, and identifying new job opportunities when they have been made redundant to allow them to continue in their training

The quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance is very good. Although almost all of the apprentices develop well their knowledge and understanding of the world of work and progression pathways in their workplaces, their knowledge and understanding of potential career pathways beyond the apprenticeship programme is inconsistent across the provision. In the best practice the apprentices are well-informed about career pathways within their sectors by the VLAs and this is supported with insightful information, advice and guidance.

## **7. Leadership and management**

### **The quality of leadership and management is outstanding**

The apprenticeship provision is led and managed very effectively at both a strategic and operational level by the operations manager for Northern Ireland and Scotland and the regional manager; all of the professional and technical areas inspected and the essential skills provision are also very well managed and co-ordinated. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and highly effective working relationships have been established between management, staff, employers, and apprentices.

Regional management and staff are supported very well by their colleagues at national level and highly effective collaborative working relationships are in place. The organisation is committed to excellence and quality improvement and a clear vision exists for the on-going development and delivery of a high quality apprenticeship provision in Northern Ireland and, in particular, the attainment of high levels of standards and achievement for all of the apprentices.

The staff demonstrate high levels of professionalism and commitment to the organisation and report that they are well supported by management. Staff performance is monitored very effectively and high quality personal and professional advice, guidance and support systems are in place to assist and support staff.

The VLAs, across all of the professional and technical areas, and the essential skills tutors are very well-qualified, have relevant professional expertise including current or recent industry experience, and have a good working knowledge of modern and commercial industry practices and standards. They are also provided with excellent opportunities to undertake regular continuing professional development relevant to their job role.

Employer engagement is a key strength of the apprenticeship provision and is outstanding. Across the professional and technical areas, there is extensive engagement with a significant range of small, medium, and large local, regional, national and international companies, and a flexible programme delivery model is used very well to meet the needs of the companies and the apprentices. Most of the apprentices have access to good or better training facilities in their workplaces, which reflects the commitment from employers and the VLAs to providing them with high-quality learning and training experiences.

Effective channels of communication have been developed with the employers to support the apprentices in their training. They are mostly well-informed about the training programme and are involved well in curriculum planning, particularly the identification of relevant qualifications and units which are matched to the job role of the apprentices. There is also evidence that a number of the employers have used their contact with the VLAs and the learning and training experiences of the apprentices to inform and support their own business planning and development needs.

Well-developed electronic management information systems, underpinned by accurate data, are used to manage and deliver the apprenticeship programmes, as well as track and monitor the progress of the apprentices. The organisation has identified the need to develop a more integrated system to further improve key management functions and this is currently being developed.

A highly effective quality assurance system is in place and includes internal verification, sampling and standardisation processes; regular staff and team meetings; internal compliance and inspection audits; and well-embedded self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. The processes are robust and are mostly used very well to track and monitor all aspects of the apprentices' journey, the assessment process, the quality of learning, teaching and training, and the overall quality of the provision.

The self evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-developed and are used effectively to promote ongoing improvement, however, they could be further refined in a number of the professional and technical areas and in the essential skills to reflect more fully key strengths in the provision, to inform improvements in course delivery, and to include more specific target setting within the quality improvement plans.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection Babcock Training has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department for Employment and Learning.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

Babcock Training has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any areas for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.

## **9. Professional and Technical area reports**

### **9.1 Active leisure, learning and wellbeing**

#### **Key findings**

In active leisure, learning and well-being, the quality of education and training provided by Babcock Training is outstanding.

#### **The achievements and standards are very good**

Almost all of the apprentices are well-motivated, enthusiastic, and speak positively about the apprenticeship and how it supports their learning. They are making steady progress in their training and demonstrate an increased understanding of active leisure, learning and well-being theory and practices, which they apply successfully in their workplaces through a range of physical activities designed to meet individual client needs. All of them give a high priority to working safely in their leisure environments and are developing the ability to carry out risk assessments as a routine part of their work. All of the employers interviewed report that the apprentices' communication and personal skills have improved well as a result of being on the apprenticeship programme, and that they carry out their duties confidently and to a high standard. The quality of the apprentices' written work is consistently very good or better, and they provide appropriate extended responses when required. The VLA provides excellent support for the contextualisation and development of the apprentices' literacy and numeracy skills, their oral communication and customer service skills, and their appropriate

use of professional and technical language. In the period since the apprenticeship programme was introduced, in November 2014, the average retention rate is outstanding at 95%. While there are no completers and no overall achievement rates, to date, all of the apprentices are making steady progression towards the completion of their programme.

### **The quality of the provision for learning is outstanding**

The quality of the learning, teaching, and training ranges from very good to outstanding, and is mainly outstanding. The professional and technical training is very well planned, the VLA is enthusiastic and supportive, develops a professional rapport with the apprentices, and uses very effectively a range of resources and a variety of active learning approaches which are matched well to their individual needs and learning preferences. The essential skills of literacy and numeracy are integrated well within the learning, teaching and training, and the VLA sets a clear rationale and context for the delivery of the personal development curriculum which helps the apprentices understand its relevance to their current and future job roles. There is a strong focus on both health and safety and the application of theory to practice. Information and learning technology is used very effectively to enhance the apprentices' learning experiences. A high level of individual support and pastoral care is provided to each of the apprentices. As a result, the apprentices are very well engaged in their learning and are developing a high degree of competence and confidence in their work; they readily agree to undertake independent learning tasks between directed training sessions. The apprentices are very well-informed of progression opportunities and possible future career progression pathways.

### **The quality of leadership and management is outstanding**

Management, at both strategic and operational level, have clear objectives and support well the ongoing development and delivery of a high quality provision in this professional and technical area, particularly the attainment of high levels of achievement and standards for all of the apprentices in both their professional and technical work and in their personal development. The VLA has relevant professional expertise and experience including an in-depth knowledge of current practice in the leisure sector, and has participated in a wide range of on-going continuing professional development. Effective links have been established with a range of employers across the leisure sector to support the development of a flexible work-based training provision, which meets their needs well, and in particular, the needs of small to medium-sized companies and their employees. They are well-informed about the training programme and are involved well in curriculum planning, particularly the identification of relevant qualifications and units which are matched to the job role of the apprentices. The self-evaluation and quality improvement processes identify relevant actions to promote improvement in this area, however, they could be further refined to reflect more fully key strengths in this area of provision and to include more specific target setting within the quality improvement planning process.

## **9.2 Customer Service**

### **Key findings**

In customer service, the quality of education and training provided by Babcock Training is outstanding.

### **The achievements and standards are very good**

Almost all of the apprentices are well-motivated, enthusiastic and can apply their learning in a range of contexts. They engage well in their learning and speak with confidence about how much they value and benefit from the training. The apprentices regularly produce work that is well above the standard required by their targeted qualifications. They are making very good progress in their training and demonstrate high standards of personal presentation and customer care skills. All of them give a high priority to working professionally to reflect best industry customer service standards. The apprentices have a positive attitude to their customers and they demonstrate a breadth of knowledge and understanding of customer service practices, which they apply effectively to their work roles. They are encouraged to demonstrate their skills development and knowledge through completing tasks, such as product and service promotion and delivering excellence in customer service. All of the employers report that the apprentices' confidence and communication skills have improved through their engagement in the training and that they can demonstrate and apply their learning effectively in the workplace. Over the last three years, the overall retention rate is good (77%). It is strength of the provision that all of those apprentices who complete their programme achieve.

### **The quality of the provision for learning is outstanding**

The quality of the learning, teaching and training is a key strength of this area of provision, in all of the directed training sessions observed, it was very good or better, and was of a consistently high standard across a diverse range of employers and commercial settings. The VLAs are committed and enthusiastic and they motivate and engage the apprentices using a broad range of teaching strategies and innovative learning resources. They work hard to raise the self-confidence and expectations of all of the apprentices and, as a result, the apprentices are developing higher levels of confidence in their work roles. In the most effective practice, the VLAs work hard to contextualise and develop the apprentices' literacy and numeracy skills within the professional and technical area. The apprentices are provided with well-planned opportunities to engage in active learning activities, and information and learning technology is used creatively to enhance their learning experiences.

The VLAs communicate effectively and work well with employers to develop a relevant curriculum offer. For example, the units identified for completion by the apprentices are planned and tailored well to reflect current practices and industry-specific skills development, as well as to support their individual training and development needs. The apprentices are provided with high levels of pastoral care, and all of them are well informed about the range of possible career progression pathways, including promotion opportunities within their job roles, and the standards required to progress to further training or education.

### **The quality of leadership and management is outstanding**

Management at all levels have a clear vision and strive for excellence in delivery and high levels of achievement and standards for all of the apprentices in this professional and technical area. Effective channels of communication and excellent working relationships have been established between management, staff, employers, and the apprentices, which contribute to successful outcomes for the apprentices. The VLAs are well qualified and have an extensive range of relevant professional experience and expertise. All of the staff are encouraged to undertake continuing professional development to enhance their teaching and training expertise. Employer engagement, across a significant range of small, medium and large local and regional companies, is extensive and the provision is supported by a flexible delivery model which meets well the needs of the companies and their employees. Most of the apprentices have access to excellent training facilities which reflect the commitment from employers and the VLAs to providing them with high quality learning and

training experiences. All of the employers interviewed value highly the training provided and comment positively about how it supports the development of the apprentices in the workplace. The self evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in this area of provision are well-developed and are used effectively to promote on-going improvement.

### **9.3 Essential Skills**

#### **Key Findings**

In the essential skills, the quality of education and training provided by Babcock Training is very good.

#### **The achievements and standards are very good**

The standards achieved by the apprentices in literacy and numeracy are mostly very good. Almost all of the apprentices interviewed reported very positively on their essential skills experiences and the employers commented on the positive impact this skills development had in the workplace. The apprentices' standards of speaking and listening are mostly very good, although a minority are reticent communicators, and the tutors work hard with these apprentices to encourage and support their development and to build their confidence. There is evidence in most of the apprentices' professional and technical portfolios that they improve their written work, over time. All of the apprentices who complete their training programme achieve an essential skills qualification, and a significant minority of them achieve above the target level required by their apprenticeship framework. It is also of note that a majority of apprentices develop positive dispositions to learning, and to further study, through their essential skills training and this is appreciated and reported on by their employers.

#### **The quality of the provision for learning is good**

The essential skills provision is planned well to meet the apprentices' needs, begins in a timely manner and runs concurrently with the professional and technical training. The quality of the learning and teaching observed is good or better. The sessions are characterised by an effective rapport between the tutors and the apprentices, the use of a wide range of appropriate delivery strategies, particularly in numeracy, including active learning approaches, effective contextualisation, good use of questioning, appropriate levels of differentiation, and engaging and purposeful use of information and learning technology. Good use is made of the initial interview process to collate the entry qualifications of the apprentices when they join the programme. The profile on entry is mostly well matched to the overall initial target levels for the essential skills and the organisation provides opportunities for the apprentices to progress beyond the minimum framework requirement, where appropriate. The diagnostic assessment process is mainly good; it works very well in numeracy but, while its use in literacy is good there is improvement needed in how it is administered and aligned more closely to the needs of all of the learners, particularly for those for whom English is not a first language. Across the provision, the apprentices are encouraged to undertake independent study and, where the apprentices levels of motivation are high, many complete tasks at home between sessions which helps to reinforce their learning. The collation of this formative work, however, needs to be strengthened further to help the apprentices to reflect on and report on their own progress in learning more effectively through the recorded feedback opportunities at the end of each session. All of the apprentices are offered the opportunity to compete in the Department's Essential Skills awards, in which a small number of apprentices have been successful.

## **The quality of leadership and management is very good**

The essential skills provision is led and managed very effectively; the recently appointed essential skills co-ordinator, management team, and lead internal verifier work very well together and provide strong leadership for the essential skills tutors. The tutors are experienced, have high aspirations for the apprentices, and are committed to supporting them to achieve. They are provided with opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development including, for example, training on autism and dyslexia. Effective processes are in place to monitor the apprentices' progress against targets set, however, the recording of the tutors' analysis of the formative progress in learning of each apprentice, needs to be further strengthened. The organisation has established very effective links with a range of employers, almost all of whom report favourably on their contact and engagement with the organisation for the delivery of the essential skills and appreciate the flexibility in arranging the essential skills delivery schedule to meet the needs of the business. The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are developing well, however, more use could be made of the outcomes of the tutor observation process and the micro-teaching opportunities to inform improvements in course delivery.

## **9.4 Hospitality and catering**

### **Key findings**

In hospitality and catering, the quality of education and training provided by Babcock Training is outstanding.

### **The achievements and standards are outstanding**

Almost all of the apprentices are highly motivated and display a positive attitude to learning. They have high personal expectations and achieve consistently high standards of work in line with the challenging targets and goals set by the VLAs. The apprentices demonstrate clearly, across a wide range of work roles, how their learning can be applied and they show increased levels of confidence as a result of undertaking their programme. Almost all of them, for example, demonstrate excellent standards of customer service and have a strong understanding of pertinent health and safety legislation requirements. Almost all of the employers interviewed report that, not only do the apprentices improve their existing knowledge and skills, they are also developing new skills and competences to support them in their job roles, for example in wine and food service, and numerous examples exist of apprentices who have successfully achieved promotion to supervisory or managerial positions as a result of attaining their professional and technical qualifications. The apprentices have mostly very good verbal communication skills and the VLAs support the on-going development of these through effective questioning strategies and the methodical recording of professional discussions to evidence their learning. Over the last three years, the overall retention rate is very good (80%). All of those apprentices who complete their programme achieve.

### **The quality of the provision for learning is very good**

The curriculum offer consists of a broad, flexible and balanced programme of learning which is socially inclusive, is matched well to the individual needs and aspirations of the apprentices and the needs of employers, and provides relevant career progression pathways. The quality of almost all of the learning, teaching, and training sessions observed ranged from good to outstanding, and were mainly very good. The more effective sessions were characterised by thorough and coherent planning, with opportunities for the learners and employers to contribute to the planning process; a clear lesson structure to consolidate and progress the learning; a wide range of highly effective and creative teaching strategies;

and the use of appropriate learner-focused tasks to stretch and challenge the apprentices. On occasion, the questioning strategies used could be further strengthened to develop the apprentices' higher level thinking skills and to better assess their learning and understanding. Information and learning technology and high-quality online learning resources were used extensively to support and enhance the apprentices learning experiences. While a majority of the apprentices had accessed the online resources more work needs to be done to encourage the apprentices to undertake more independent learning. A range of appropriate assessment methods are used to support the apprentices to achieve their learning targets and goals, and they are kept well informed about their progress and what needs to be done to further improve. The majority of the apprentices are also well informed about possible career pathways in the hospitality and catering industry including progression to higher education courses, however, the quality of the provision for careers education, information advice and guidance needs to be strengthened for a minority of the level 3 apprentices.

### **The quality of leadership and management is outstanding**

Management and staff are committed to excellence and quality improvement in this professional and technical area. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, clear channels of communication exist, and regular contact takes place between management and the VLAs to ensure that a high quality provision is delivered to meet the needs of all of the apprentices and their employers. The VLAs are well-qualified and have extensive current or recent industrial experience in the hospitality and catering sector. They are well supported by management and are provided with appropriate opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development to meet their individual needs. Employer engagement is outstanding. Links and partnerships, and high-quality working relationships, have been established with a wide range of large, small and medium-sized companies and organisations across the hospitality and catering industry. Employers play a key role in informing curriculum planning and there is evidence that a number of them have used their contact with the VLAs and the training and learning experiences of the apprentices to inform and support their own business planning and development needs.

## **9.5 Retail**

### **Key findings**

In retail, the quality of education and training provided by Babcock Training is outstanding.

### **Achievements and standards are outstanding**

Almost all of the apprentices are highly motivated, enthusiastic learners. Whilst they enter the programme with a level of skills and expertise acquired through their job role, the training further develops and enhances their underpinning knowledge and understanding of key elements of retailing such as consumer law, sales and associated legislation, as well as their personal and social skills. The apprentices demonstrate high levels of competence in the retail environment and the standards developed by most of them are very good. Almost all of the employers report that the apprentices have significantly grown in confidence and, as a result, they are able to take on additional responsibilities and perform more effectively in key functions such as merchandising. In addition, there is clear evidence that the training supports well the apprentices in gaining promotion both within the company and externally, with one large employer reporting that the training provided a 'talent pipeline' for the company. Nearly all of the apprentices speak very confidently about their work and can communicate using appropriate terminology and technical language in the directed training sessions, for example, to offer opinions, and suggest improvements to existing systems.



There is evidence in the majority of the apprentices' files of extended written work, however, the marking for improvement is inconsistent and needs to be developed further. Over the last three years, the overall retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is very good (82%). All of the apprentices who complete their programme achieve.

### **The quality of the provision for learning is very good**

The VLAs develop excellent, highly supportive and productive working relationships with the apprentices. The apprentices undergo a thorough induction programme, which is effective in providing them with a good understanding of the content of their programme. The pace of the work is matched well to the needs of almost all of the apprentices and there are effective systems in place to allow them, where appropriate, to progress more quickly through the programme. The professional and technical training is undertaken mainly on a one-to-one basis in the work place. In one large company, this is supplemented by group learning sessions which are effective in promoting discussion, enabling the apprentices to learn from each other. This model should be extended across a wider range of retail businesses. The short-term planning for the directed training sessions is very good, the long-term planning, however, needs to be strengthened further. The quality of the learning, teaching, and training is good or better, and is mainly very good. There is an appropriate focus on developing the apprentices' underpinning knowledge and their independent study skills. The VLAs are highly experienced and use this effectively to enhance the delivery and to engage the apprentices. In the best practice there is skilful use of questioning and active learning approaches to develop the apprentices thinking skills. The employers and apprentices input effectively into the regular reviews of the apprentices' progress; most of the target setting, however, is overly focused on the completion of units. The apprentices in this area of provision receive effective personal career planning and impartial advice and guidance to help them make informed choices.

### **The quality of leadership and management is outstanding**

The quality of the leadership and management of the retail provision is outstanding. The management and all of the VLAs demonstrate high levels of commitment to excellence in training. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the staff are appropriately deployed. Lines of communication at all levels are coherent and are facilitated well through a regular programme of meetings. The staff are highly experienced in the occupational area and their skills are continuously updated through continuing professional development including engagement in industry days. The engagement with employers and the retail industry is outstanding; the organisation has secured training contracts with key regional employers along with a range of small independent retailers. These relationships are well-established and have strengthened through the strong partnership working developed across all of the stakeholders. Excellent communication channels are maintained through regular attendance at the employers' management team meetings and the regular updates from the VLAs. These meetings are used to excellent effect to brief the employers on the performance of the apprentices, to inform the choice of optional units and to promote the programme. The self-evaluation report for retail is well-written, evaluative and makes very good use of best practice examples and feedback from the apprentices to inform the evaluations.

**Current registrations by programme**

Programme		Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	L2	350	50%
	L3	352	50%
	Total	702	100%

**Current registrations by professional and technical area**

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Active leisure learning and well-being	28	4
Customer service	41	6
Essential Skills	335	48
Hospitality and catering	474	68
Retail	159	22

**Qualifications of current apprentices on entry to their programme**

Programme	Apprenticeships NI (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	41
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	4
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	63
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	58
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	72
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	10

Note: All data was sourced from Babcock Training Limited at the time of the inspection.

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