

National Grid PLC

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53457

Name of lead inspector: Tim Hanson HMI

Last day of inspection: 22 January 2010

Type of provider: Employer

Address: National Grid House
Warwick Technology Park
Gallows Hill
Warwick
CV34 6DA

Telephone number: 01926653000

Information about the provider

1. National Grid owns and operates regulated electricity and gas infrastructure networks in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States. Approximately 10,400 staff manages the electrical and gas transmission and distribution systems in the UK. The company's headquarters are in Warwick and the national training centre is in Eakring, Nottinghamshire.
2. Contracting with the National Employer Service (NES) National Grid currently has 124 advanced apprentices across their gas and electricity operations. Directly employed and subcontractor staff support the apprenticeship programme nationally for both on- and off-the-job training. All apprentices are employed and, subject to satisfactory apprenticeship completion, continue in their chosen job role.
3. National Grid were last inspected in 2005 and judged to be an outstanding provider overall with good contributory grades for equality of opportunity and quality improvement.
4. The following organisations provide training on behalf of National Grid:
 - Develop Training
 - Walsall College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in
Employer provision	2008/09
Apprenticeships	124 Apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 1
Capacity to improve		Grade 1
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		1
Quality of provision		1
Leadership and management		1
Safeguarding		1
Equality and diversity		1
Subject Area		
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies		1

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of National Grid's provision is outstanding. The company has an outstanding capacity to improve and provides excellent training with outstanding outcomes. Provision in engineering is outstanding. Learners acquire extremely high levels of skills. National Grid staff provide outstanding levels of support. The quality of provision is outstanding with excellent teaching and learning. Safeguarding of learners is outstanding. Health and safety has a very high priority across the organisation with a particular emphasis on learners' safety. Learners have high levels of awareness of both occupational health and safety and general health and well-being. Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers at all levels are dedicated to improving the business through promotion and development of the apprenticeship programme. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. An excellent range of initiatives widens participation and promotes a strong culture of inclusiveness. Learners have a particularly good knowledge of equality and diversity issues.

Main findings

- National Grid has outstanding success rates for engineering apprentices. In 2008/09 the overall success rate for apprentices was 94% and the timely success rate was 92%.

- Practical skills development is exceptionally good. Learners develop very good personal and behavioural skills. On-site learners quickly develop a range of practical skills that build on their off-the-job training. Learners greatly increase their confidence. Throughout training, staff place great emphasis on safety and adherence to correct procedures.
- Training is planned very well. Training managers and staff work very effectively in partnership to ensure that the qualifications align closely with the needs of the business. However, opportunities to accredit wider key skills on the electrical programme are missed.
- Teaching, training and learning are outstanding. Off-the-job training is very well organised and delivered. Learning on-the-job is very good. Apprentices respond well to training.
- The support for learners is particularly good. Mentors provide high levels of support for learners at work. Learners have frequent supportive individual meetings with training staff although recording of reviews lacks consistency.
- Senior executives and managers provide outstanding leadership and management. They promote high standards of learning and skills, and strategic planning is strong.
- Operational management of the apprenticeship programme is outstanding. Management information systems are very good and used very well to evaluate, plan and improve performance. The observation of teaching and learning process however, lacks clarity.
- National Grid has very clear strategies to develop the apprenticeship programme. National Grid plays a leading role in promoting and implementing national strategies to improve engineering utilities training.
- Safeguarding and, in particular, health and safety are very well understood by learners. National Grid carries out thorough risk assessment of all activities. Health and safety is strongly reinforced at learner reviews. Promotion and understanding of health and well-being are an integral part of the apprenticeship. Learners feel very safe.
- All learners and staff have very high levels of understanding of equality and diversity issues. Innovative initiatives are in place to widen participation but have not had a significant impact.
- Managers regularly involve users in strategies that bring about improvement. Self-assessment is good. Benchmarking and the process for improving teaching, training and learning are areas for further development.
- National Grid provides outstanding value for money. Success rates over the past five years are particularly high. Very well managed resources and high levels of investment support the apprenticeship and provide superb training facilities.

What does National Grid need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standard of recording of reviews by ensuring the consistency of their content and managing the location of reviews to meet learners' needs.
- Implement a more comprehensive evaluation process of teaching, training and learning, by emphasising learning, the learners' experience and outcomes that align with the company's learning objectives.
- Ensure opportunities to accredit additional learning takes place on all programmes by identifying and assessing apprentices wider key skills.
- Review marketing of the programme to increase the participation of women and minority ethnic groups. Identify providers who have been particularly successful in this area to share good practice.
- Develop a wider range of external good practice links to improve further the use of benchmarking of performance against national averages and exceptional standards.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- having access to excellent training resources
- flexibility of the training programme
- outward bound training
- training that reflects what happens at work
- having the guarantee of a career
- attending all the different courses
- good information provided by the mentor
- good benefits package.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more activities to do at night
- more time to write up evidence for the NVQ
- cover more material at college
- more time on site.

Summary of the views of supervisors as confirmed by inspectors

What supervisors like:

- apprentices' enthusiasm and appetite to learn
- excellent balance of practical and theoretical skills the apprentices gain
- excellent levels of learners' motivation
- help and direction provided by the learning and development team.

What employers would like to see improved:

- nothing to report.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

6. National Grid demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve. Outstanding at the previous inspection, the organisation has continued to improve provision. Success rates have continued to rise and they are now more than 20 percentage points above the national average for both overall and timely success rates. Investment in staff and resources, including two new training centres, is outstanding. The organisation has introduced the latest technologies into the teaching and learning process. Additions to the management information system have improved the monitoring of learners' progress and the analysis of different learner groups' performance. Many examples of improvements suggested by learners are in place. Senior managers are fully involved in the improvement process and their long term planning ensures the future security of the apprentice programme. Staff targets are challenging and regularly reviewed. Dynamic relationships with subcontractors have resulted in programme improvements in the training centre and on site.
7. Self-assessment is very good and based on extremely thorough review and evaluation systems that provide an accurate and comprehensive analysis of the programme. The well-managed process uses a wide range of users' views. Use of data is particularly effective in supporting judgements. The current report is extremely accurate and evaluative. Improvement planning is rigorous and clearly establishes actions for further improvement. The very well managed quality improvement arrangements are excellent.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

8. Outcomes for learners are outstanding. In 2008/09, the overall and timely success rates were outstanding at 94% and 92% respectively. These rates far exceed the national averages. Trends have shown a constant increase in success rates over the last three years. Very good use of management information is made to compare the performance of different groups of learners.
9. Practical skills development is exceptionally good. On-site learners quickly develop a wide range of practical skills. All learners greatly increase their confidence. Throughout training, staff place great emphasis on safety and adherence to correct procedures. Learners feel safe. Learners develop exceptional social skills through working and sharing accommodation with colleagues. Most learners remain with National Grid on completion of their apprenticeship. Many enter higher education on completion of their technical certificates. On the electrical programme opportunities to accredit wider key skills are missed.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

10. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching, training and learning are outstanding. All sessions observed by inspectors were good or better. Learners are fully engaged and their feedback is extremely positive. Frequent assessment in the workplace is often at learners' request. Learning materials are of an exceptionally high standard. Internal verification is particularly thorough. Highly effective sampling ensures portfolio evidence and the observation of assessors is very well planned and effective. Staff hold regular assessment and verification standardisation meetings.
11. Programmes fully meet the needs of learners and the business. Very clear progression routes are in place to develop skills and technical competence. Many learners progress into higher education. Assessment in the workplace meets business needs effectively. An extensive range of additional qualifications includes first aid, manual handling and driving and plant operation. Many additional activities are available including team building, gymnasium activity, football, bowling and swimming.
12. The provider works very effectively with partners including other employers, colleges, schools and sector skills groups, to meet the needs of young people. Very successful internal partnerships exist with mentors and subcontractors. Training managers and staff work very effectively with divisional directors and managers to develop the programme.
13. The support for learners is particularly good. The use of individual mentors is effective. A training programme for mentors helps them monitor the performance and progress of their learners effectively. Good examples of individual support are in place. During progress reviews, monitoring of all aspects of the apprenticeship and highly effective target setting take place. Learners discuss fully equality, diversity, health and safety aspects in the context of their working environment. Inspectors identified a few inconsistencies in completion of review documents and a few learners have to travel long distances to attend review meetings.
14. Training resources are outstanding. Gas training offers particularly innovative simulation activities. In high voltage switching, a substation enables learners gain an appreciation of the requirements to become an authorised person. The simulations replicate communications with central authorities and trains apprentices in the correct procedures of switching service systems. Learners have access to 3D modelling software packages that simulate on-site maintenance. Electronic training materials and assessment, with feedback capabilities, are available on the intranet. Detailed analysis of learners' activity supports improvement of the learning materials and the effectiveness of the programme.
15. Very good opportunities for learners to influence programmes include membership of quality improvement groups and regular feedback following

training and progress reviews. Many good examples of improvements made following learners' feedback are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

16. Senior executives and managers provide outstanding leadership and management. They are strongly committed to active promotion of high standards. Managers take successful and decisive actions to sustain high performance and improve all aspects of provision. The company has very high expectations for apprentices and staff.
17. Operational management is outstanding. Managers successfully apply very clear strategies to develop the programme. They use outstanding management information systems very effectively to evaluate, plan and improve performance. Internal communications, to support the performance and development of the programme, are very good and well managed. Staff are very clear about their programme priorities and work very effectively to meet individual learners' needs. Subcontractor arrangements are extremely well managed and monitored.
18. Safeguarding arrangements within National Grid are outstanding. A range of safeguarding policies, overseen by a qualified member of staff, are rigorously implemented and monitored. Awareness raising sessions have taken place for all training staff and managers. Risk assessments are completed for all aspects of the programme. Learners feel very safe and understand safeguarding in detail. Health and well-being is an integral part of the programme and provides advice and support for fitness, diet and general health issues. All training staff have enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks and the organisation has an implementation plan for the Independent Safeguarding Authority vetting and barring scheme. Close monitoring of subcontractor arrangements for safeguarding takes place and form part of all agreements.
19. Outstanding arrangements are in place to ensure the health and safety of learners. All aspects of the programme have a very clear focus on safety. Managers promote safety well and set demanding targets to ensure a safe working environment. Regular re-enforcement of health and safety takes place at learners' reviews and forms a key focus at induction and all training events. A range of policies, procedures and risk assessments underpin health and safety including safe driving, internet safety and harassment and bullying. All training staff have been trained to promote the Every Child Matters agenda and it is clearly linked to key aspects of the programme and the organisations' safeguarding procedures.
20. Equality and diversity within National Grid are outstanding. Staff and learners have particularly high levels of awareness of equality and diversity, which learners' reviews and staff training regularly reinforce. Senior managers have introduced an inclusion charter and set demanding targets to widen participation of under-represented groups. The chairman of National Grid launched a 'global inclusion fortnight', to raise awareness of diversity, in 2009. A

wide range of initiatives to encourage women and minority ethnic groups in to engineering are in place and representation is currently in line with national averages. Studies are in place to explore recruitment from these groups. The company has introduced secondments from minority ethnic groups to assist in widening participation. Excellent systems are in place to analyse regularly the performance of different groups of learners including at each stage of the recruitment process, to inform future inclusion strategies. Strict anti-bullying and harassment procedures are in place and implemented successfully. Regular respect surveys take place and show National Grid to be a well-regarded and inclusive employer.

21. Ambitious objectives for improvement are in place. These include significant investment in learning technology that will directly benefit learners. The organisation plays a leading role nationally in promoting and implementing training strategies. National Grid makes very good use of strategic alliances to extend its education and training aims through careers pathways and progression into further and higher education.
22. Managers apply well-defined methods to involve programme users in strategies for improvement. Managers compare their performance to support improvement, although their identification of external best practice is underdeveloped. The process for improving teaching and learning is rigorous but insufficiently evaluates a minority of aspects.
23. National Grid provides outstanding value for money. Success rates over the past five years are very high. Very well-managed resources and high levels of investment support the programme and provide very high standard engineering training facilities. Learners benefit from being able to work with particularly skilled and knowledgeable colleagues.

Information about the inspection

24. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's transmissions technical training manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievements since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews and reviewed a range of documentary evidence.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**National Grid PLC**

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	124	124
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	1	1
Capacity to improve	1	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1	
How well do learners progress?	1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	1	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	N/A	
Quality of provision	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	1	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1	
Leadership and management	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	N/A	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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