

Network Rail

Employer

Inspection dates		14-18 January 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Success rates are high and have been consistently so since the previous inspection in 2008.
- Learners make appropriate progress, relative to their starting points.
- Learners develop good engineering and personal skills and enjoy their training.
- Teaching is good, supported by good learning resources.
- Outstanding care and support are provided for learners during the residential parts of the programme, at HMS Collingwood and HMS Sultan, especially during extended periods spent away from home.
- Leaders and managers have high ambitions for both the programme and individual learners that help to motivate learners well.
- The apprenticeship programme meets the business needs of Network Rail very well.
- Network Rail places a very strong emphasis on the health, safety and well-being of learners. Learners demonstrate a high awareness of their responsibilities in a high-risk work environment.
- Managers use very effective partnerships to support learners and offer extended development activities.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Assessment practice requires improvement.
- Feedback to learners is insufficient to help them understand what they have to do to improve.
- Workplace supervisors in the rail depots are insufficiently involved in the training of learners.
- Formal progress reviews are ineffective in driving progress. Assessors are not consistently involved in setting targets for learning and assessment during formal reviews.
- Leaders and managers do not analyse data sufficiently or use it to understand fully the effectiveness of the programme and the experiences of learners.
- Aspects of the quality improvement arrangements remain underdeveloped.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who complete all parts of their framework within the planned duration of their training by accurately monitoring individual learners' progress and better coordinating the learning and assessment opportunities within the workplace.
- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning by planning sessions to meet the needs of all learners, including better planned use of information and communication technology (ICT) and extension activities that maintain an appropriate pace and motivation, particularly for the more able learners.
- Make sure all depot managers fully understand their contribution to the training programmes. In particular, ensuring they agree learning targets during reviews so that learners and employers know exactly how to use work activities to help learners complete their apprenticeship.
- Ensure all learners receive detailed, written feedback following assessments which accurately records their progress towards their main learning aims, identifies the skills they have developed and helps them to plan what they have to do to succeed.
- Improve the quality of training and assessment for all learners by introducing comprehensive and robust quality improvement arrangements which identify examples of best practice and support an accurate self-evaluation process, with associated development plans.
- Fully analyse data, learners' feedback and quality assurance reports to identify performance trends in order to plan actions that improve the achievement of all groups, supported by the setting and use of ambitious milestones targets.
- Improve the promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity topics to learners by providing a greater range of resources that support the discussion of a wider range of relevant topics. Make use of relevant current affairs and media reports which help relate issues more closely to the learners' work experiences or career aspirations.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Success rates are consistently high. Since the previous inspection engineering advanced apprenticeship success rates have been above the national average. In 2011/12, around 88% of learners successfully completed all parts of their framework. Inspectors found no significant differences in success rates for different groups of learners.
- The proportion of those completing within the planned duration of the programme is higher than the national average for all engineering training providers, although it remains significantly lower than overall success rate for this programme. Learners make appropriate progress towards their learning outcomes, relative to their starting point, although a few make slow progress.
- Learners demonstrate the development of a wide range of good engineering and personal skills. They exhibit good technical skills, for example when fault finding in electrical signalling systems, and understand clearly the work that they undertake in their regional depot. Learners develop good team-working, communication and leadership skills through participation in group sports activities and their work with local community projects and heritage railways.
- Learners achieve a wide variety of relevant additional qualifications, over and above the framework requirements, that enhance their self-confidence and career aspirations well. For example, most learners achieve leadership and management qualifications as well as completing courses in manual handling, first aid, track maintenance or signal maintenance.

- Most learners progress to sustained employment, higher-level qualifications or supervisory work roles. One quarter of learners progress to higher education engineering courses, sponsored by Network Rail, on completion of their programmes.
- Learners have a very good understanding of health and safety topics and the necessity of following safe working practices in a potentially dangerous work setting. Learners clearly understand their rights and responsibilities and demonstrate good respect and behaviour towards each other.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching and learning in practical and theory sessions are good and support the good outcomes for learners. Instructors use their knowledge well to plan and deliver sessions that develop learners' vocational skills particularly effectively. In a small number of lessons, however, learners are not sufficiently challenged by the planned activities. Instructors use a limited range of strategies to engage learners and consequently a few sessions are uninspiring and dull, with a few learners not fully participating.
- Resources and facilities in the training centre and workshops are of a high standard and support learning well, particularly those in the Network Rail training centre which provides a very realistic working environment. Training areas are appropriately equipped with ICT; however, instructors make insufficient use of these resources to support learning and promote further research and independent study.
- Learners behave very well, they are polite, considerate and show a great enthusiasm for their learning, working diligently, carefully and particularly enjoying practical tasks. Clear expectations of good behaviour and conduct reinforce a strong, positive company image and high standards. Learners rapidly gain in confidence, self-esteem and are excellent ambassadors for the apprenticeship programme and frequently have a positive influence on their colleagues in the workplace.
- Health and safety have an exceedingly high priority in all aspects of the training, learners are acutely aware of possible consequences of their actions and are able to take significant responsibility for their own safety, together with that of their work colleagues and the travelling public.
- Many learners progress to higher level qualifications and to supervisory and managerial positions and provide excellent role models for the current learners.
- Care and welfare support for learners is outstanding during the residential periods of the first year at HMS Collingwood and in subsequent years at HMS Sultan. Learners have access to a nurse and chaplaincy facilities and take part in health and fitness programmes, including healthy eating and fitness plans. They greatly value these options and speak highly of the impact on their lives, becoming fitter and losing weight. Additionally, many undertake fitness training to achieve sporting ambitions, such as participating in the annual Field Gun Challenge organised by the armed forces.
- Assessment practice requires improvement. In the second and third years of the programme, assessors place an over reliance on written work rather than assessment by direct observation of the learners' practical competence.
- Written feedback on learners' assessments throughout their training is insufficient. It is frequently very brief and does not sufficiently indicate how the learner could improve. Training staff place too much emphasis on meeting minimum word count standards. Spelling and grammatical errors are often not corrected.
- Formal reviews of learners' progress are ineffective at adding pace and challenge to the training programmes. The setting of realistic targets for progress and learning is weak. It is not clear how progress in all aspects of the programme is planned and monitored for each individual learner. An online monitoring system is being piloted with recently recruited learners but it is too early to make a reliable judgement on its effectiveness.

- Workplace managers' detailed understanding of the requirements of the programme is insufficient and few managers know how they can link off-the-job training to planned work tasks or plan effective practical assessment opportunities.
- Information and guidance, particularly during the rigorous recruitment process, are helpful in helping learners clearly understand the structure and demands of the programme and the next phases of their training, including progression into a rail depot close to their home location.
- Checking and reinforcement of the learners' understanding of relevant topics are insufficient throughout their programme. Equality and diversity topics are introduced during the programme induction and reinforced during leadership training sessions, but not in other subject sessions. Little reference is made to diversity issues during formal progress reviews.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers provide very strong direction to the company's apprenticeship programme that is clearly understood by the company and subcontractors' staff. Learners fully understand the contribution to their personal and career development that successful completion of the programme can make. Expectations of the programme and individual learners are very high and these motivate learners particularly well.
- The apprenticeship meets the strategic and business needs of Network Rail very well. Network Rail has a clear strategy to improve its core business through significant investment in staff training and development. The apprentice programme supports the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce very effectively. Learners receive an excellent induction to the corporate values and objectives of Network Rail and their expected contribution to the success of the company.
- Network Rail has good partnership arrangements to support learners and extend their learning. Managers work closely with the subcontractor, the Royal Navy, heritage railway organisations and local community groups to offer an enjoyable, diverse range of personal development, sporting, leisure and learning opportunities for learners, for example using their practical skills helping volunteers to maintain the historic Ffestiniog railway in Wales.
- Operational management of the apprenticeship programme is good. Managers have a close working knowledge of the programme and the progress of individual learners. Managers meet frequently with subcontractors' staff to discuss the progress of groups of learners, suggest improvements to the programme and monitor the welfare of current learners.
- Leaders and managers analyse and use data insufficiently to monitor and plan improvements to all of the provision. A wide range of data is available; sufficient reports regarding large groups of learners are produced to support contract compliance and manage subcontractor performance. A number of additional, more detailed data reports has been produced very recently. However, it is too early to judge the usefulness of these in supporting improvement plans.
- Quality improvement arrangements are underdeveloped. Managers observe teaching and learning frequently during the first year in the training centre. However, written reports of observations often do not contain sufficient detail to explain the grades awarded or identify good practice. The current system focuses on the performance of the instructor and insufficiently on the learning taking place. The standardisation process through paired observations by observers does not sufficiently ensure consistency of judgements or grades awarded by the five observers.
- Internal verification is not carried out until close to the completion of the framework and is too late to identify and help those learners making slow progress. Internal verification and quality systems have not identified the weaknesses in assessment practice. The most recent self-assessment report overstates some of the strengths of the provision and does not reflect all of the areas for improvement.
- The subcontractor collects whole-class feedback upon completion of each module which is analysed and shared with managers and learners. However, this fails to capture sufficiently the

views of individual learners on the quality of their experience and their suggestions for improvement. Learners' feedback is not sufficiently analysed to identify trends in performance or to monitor the effectiveness of actions taken.

- Network Rail places a very strong emphasis on the health, safety, safeguarding and well-being of learners. Leaders and managers demonstrate an acute awareness of the need for safety in a high-risk work environment and ensure that all learners and partner organisations demonstrate their understanding by the application of risk-reduction and safe working procedures throughout the programme. Network Rail managers have rightly prioritised the provision of outstanding care and support for learners' well-being during the residential phases of their training. The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners.
- Network Rail promotes equality and diversity appropriately and has successfully increased the small number of female apprentices. No significant differences are evident in outcomes for different groups of learners. A review of company equality and diversity arrangements is too recent to accurately judge the impact of the associated action plans.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Network Rail

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Engineering	2

[illegible]

Additional socio-economic information

Network Rail is a large national employer and recruits apprentices from a wide variety of backgrounds across the whole of Great Britain.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Gerard McGrath HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the apprentice development manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject area listed in the report.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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