

National Grid PLC

Inspection dates

15–18 November 2016

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Outstanding	

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Apprentices make outstanding progress and achievement rates are very high.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has remained outstanding since the previous inspection.
- Resources to support learning and skills development are outstanding.
- A very high proportion of apprentices remain in sustainable employment, progress to higher qualifications and gain positions of responsibility.
- Collaboration with government and the energy sector to align the range and content of provision to meet local and national needs and priorities is outstanding.
- Apprentices have an excellent understanding of health and safety.
- Staff have very good industry knowledge and experience that they use effectively to develop apprentices' skills and understanding.
- Apprentices display high levels of competence and their behaviour and attitudes are exemplary.
- Apprentices receive excellent information, advice and guidance that prepare them very well for their chosen career paths.
- Apprentices have a very good understanding of modern British values and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Full report

Information about the provider

- National Grid PLC owns and operates regulated electricity and gas infrastructure networks in the UK and the USA. Approximately 10,200 staff manage 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. Currently 223 advanced apprentices work across gas and electricity operations. All apprentices are employed and, subject to satisfactory completion of their apprenticeship, continue in their chosen job role.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop initiatives to create a more inclusive and diverse apprentice workforce to meet future national energy requirements and business needs.
- Ensure that observations of teaching, learning and assessment have a clear focus on the impact of teaching and training on learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding. Governors, leaders and managers have successfully maintained the very high standards reported on by the previous inspection team and have ensured that the provision for apprentices remains outstanding. They have successfully promoted a highly supportive and ambitious culture and, consequently, the pursuit of excellence pervades on- and off-the-job training and development. All apprentices understand this very well and display the values and behaviours expected of them at all times.
- Teaching, learning and assessment remain outstanding. Clearly targeted high-quality continuous professional development, linked effectively to business objectives and robust performance management, has maintained very high standards. As a result, all staff are highly motivated and have shared commitment to continuous improvement and the health and safety of apprentices. For example, staff use their very broad range of skills and knowledge to ensure that apprentices have a very thorough theoretical and practical understanding of the health and safety requirements when working as a power network or gas network craftsman.
- The self-assessment process is highly inclusive and focuses effectively on feedback from apprentices through regular engagement via meetings and surveys. Business departments use action plans, created from apprentices' feedback, to implement improvements and monitor progress effectively. Stakeholder feedback obtained from steering groups, working groups and mentor meetings is equally thorough and effective in informing self-assessment. As a result, governors, leaders and managers are very well informed. Inspectors found the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan an accurate representation of the provision.
- Leaders and managers promote the reinforcement of English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT) very well. Tutors and assessors understand the importance of the further development of these skills in the classroom and workplace even though the vast majority of apprentices have high levels of skills on entry to the programme. Apprentices who experience difficulties in gaining higher-levels skills in some aspects of their work receive effective support.
- National Grid's involvement with government and sector partners working on policy and strategy within the energy sector is outstanding. Its work with industrial partners and sector bodies is extremely productive. As a result, it is highly proactive and successful in developing apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of national and local priorities, and in designing highly relevant training for its apprentices.
- The progression of apprentices into sustainable employment, further qualifications and promotion within the business is exceptional. The vast majority of apprentices remain employed by National Grid five years after completing their apprenticeships. Both the UK head of the academy, the UK new talent manager and a significant number of senior managers are former apprentices. As a result, apprentices have career paths and role models that they can make frequent reference to as well as receiving highly effective information, advice and guidance.

- Leaders and managers make very good use of data through dashboards that are available to monitor progress and the quality of the programmes. Apprentices have a very good understanding of the progress they make through the effective use of tracking and monitoring software.
- Managers recognise the importance of enhancing apprentices' knowledge and understanding by providing the delivery of specialist technical training as an additional part of the apprenticeship programme. Apprentices' personal development is further encouraged through voluntary work or involvement in their local communities.
- National Grid has a detailed understanding of the requirements of the energy sector and its leaders have successfully focused its businesses on the need to embrace the challenges ahead. For example, it has communicated effectively to its staff the need to create a much more inclusive and diverse workforce to meet the predicted future shortfall in engineers. As a result, it has increased its involvement in television and cinema advertising, and engagement in science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) projects aimed at motivating the engineers of the future. Although the number of apprentices from under-represented groups has improved on the apprenticeship programme since the previous inspection, participation by women and those from minority ethnic groups is still low.

The governance of the provider

- Governance of the provision is outstanding. The academy board is a global board represented by both heads of the UK and USA academies and all senior business managers. The board meets regularly to provide strategic guidance, oversight and constructive challenge. Learning councils support the board well by providing a strong link between each business and the academy. They ensure performance monitoring of the provision and provide additional strategic direction.
- Strong governance of the provision is instrumental in ensuring that outcomes for apprentices remain at the very high rate, and that the promotion of important initiatives such as the 'Prevent' duty and safeguarding are effective. For example, tutors are encouraged to promote apprentices' understanding of modern British values through their understanding of National Grid's core values.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive appropriate recruitment and background checks. All tutors and assessors receive enhanced checks. Up-to-date detailed records of all employees, appropriate risk assessments and a suitable visiting speaker policy are in place.
- Staff promote safe working practices consistently and effectively. Consequently, apprentices' understanding of health and safety is exemplary.
- Apprentices feel safe and have a very good understanding of what to do if they need to report any concerns. They have a good understanding of the dangers of cyber bullying, online grooming and access to inappropriate materials.

- Apprentices have a good appreciation of modern British values and the relevance of these to their current and future job roles. Apprentices have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and know what to look for and what to do if they are concerned about radicalisation and extremism.
- Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. Appropriately trained members of staff are the designated safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty officers. Staff are aware of the need to protect learners against radicalisation and extremism, and have received 'Prevent' duty training and updated professional development regarding safeguarding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Arrangements for recruitment and selection are particularly robust and challenging, ensuring that apprentices are on the right programme. Induction is especially effective in setting out learning and qualification requirements, and in securing a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the programme. National energy requirements and business needs underpin both gas and power apprenticeship programmes to ensure that apprentices receive the right training to prepare them well for the future and to develop the skills needed to succeed in their chosen careers.
- Staff expectations of apprentices are very high from the outset. As a result, they soon become highly disciplined in their approach to learning and to work. They share learning experiences and work together collaboratively to support one another's development. Assessment is frequent and well planned. Assessors monitor and support apprentices who fall behind very effectively. As a result, apprentices make very good progress and achieve their qualifications. High standards of quality assurance of assessment ensure that assessment practice, the quality of apprentices' practical work and their portfolios are excellent.
- Support for apprentices is exceptional. Individual mentoring of apprentices is very effective in ensuring progress and in targeting additional learning support when required. Mentors are well trained and highly effective in their role. Apprentices on residential training away from home are cared for particularly well with high-standard accommodation and access to a wide range of sports and leisure facilities including a gymnasium, bowling, golf and swimming. Apprentices also take part in community activity and in school visits and careers events, and have a wide range of benefits including financial assistance with driving lessons.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced and use their extensive up-to-date vocational knowledge to ensure that apprentices develop high professional standards, good vocational skills and technical understanding. As a result, apprentices receive good-quality feedback, rigorous progress reviews and clear, challenging targets. Off-the-job training is stimulating, supported by motivating and challenging practical tasks. On-the-job training standards are excellent with apprentices contributing to work in real-time maintenance, system faults and repair situations.

- Staff trust apprentices with significant resources in learning and to accept considerable responsibilities in their work. For example, apprentices learn how to create safe working environments when working in all weathers and at height. They carry out risk assessments and check structures, and learn how to respond to gas emergencies reported by the public safely and effectively.
- The resources and facilities for training and assessment are outstanding. They range from the old and trusted to the new and emerging to ensure that all apprentices have a thorough grounding and good understanding of future needs. For example, the use of computer-based training and assessment is extensive and provides valuable feedback to apprentices. Apprentices use unique and bespoke 3D training facilities for leading-edge training in complex high and low pressure gas systems, as well as high-voltage substation switching and overhead line laying and maintenance. Feedback from apprentices informs improvements in programme content and delivery and learning resources systematically.
- Apprentices have excellent progression opportunities to positions of responsibility in the workplace and to higher levels of study. For instance, many current trainers and assessors are previous National Grid apprentices. Career pathways are clear and understood well by apprentices. All staff celebrate apprentices' achievement and those who have volunteered or provided support to others are recognised.
- Apprentices feel very safe, work safely and understand their role and responsibilities regarding safeguarding particularly well. Attention to health and safety standards in learning and the workplace is exemplary.
- The programme is highly effective in promoting equality of opportunity and diversity. Apprentices' knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty and procedures to follow if they have or know of a concern is very good. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe when using online resources. They respect and value the ever-increasing diverse culture they work in. Apprentices have a particularly good understanding of British values and are aware of how these values relate to National Grid's core values.
- Observations of teaching, learning and assessment are highly effective in supporting improvement. However, in a small minority of cases, observers pay too much attention to methodology and not enough to the impact of teaching on learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Apprentices are participative and articulate in learning sessions and particularly enjoy their training. They are very confident and proud when presenting their work to their peers and staff. Their behaviour in lessons and in work is exemplary. They treat each other and others they encounter with respect and courtesy. Attendance and punctuality are outstanding.
- Apprentices develop excellent employability skills such as structuring reports, teamworking, communication, creating and delivering presentations, and honing self-reflection skills in their logbooks. Apprentices present themselves very well, for example dressing smartly to meet the expectations of National Grid.

- The apprenticeship programmes support technical, personal and social skills development effectively and in equal measure. Trainers intervene early in induction and in learning to raise the self-confidence and self-awareness of apprentices. This is highly effective in supporting transition from school to apprenticeships, and in developing the behaviours and attitudes that allow apprentices to integrate naturally and respectfully with colleagues in the workplace.
- Apprentices develop their mathematical skills very well in calculating pressure and volume when maintaining and repairing gas equipment, calculating oxygen levels, exposure times, sling angles, voltage drop and resistance in cables. Most apprentices make good use of ICT to research for, and prepare, assessed work. Apprentices are highly literate and articulate, and develop their English skills adequately through the use of logbooks and feedback of assessed materials. National Grid recognises the need to develop English skills further.
- Apprentices develop the very good standards of work expected in a technical and demanding engineering context. They are aware of their next steps in learning and excellent information, advice and guidance enable staff to match job opportunities closely to apprentices' career aspirations.
- Apprentices feel extremely safe and very well supported both in their training sessions and in the workplace. They have an excellent awareness of health and safety at work and they apply safe working practices diligently. They have a good awareness of what to do if they have concerns through well-publicised access to emergency hotlines.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Outcomes for apprentices are outstanding. The overall achievement rate and achievement rate for apprentices completing within agreed timescales are both very high and have been since the previous inspection. However, the published apprenticeship achievement rates for 2014/15, based on low numbers, are not complete. They do not include the very high achievement rates of the vast majority of apprentices moved to an employer pilot project, as confirmed by the funding body. Data supplied by National Grid for 2015/16 maintains the very high achievement rates for all apprentices.
- The use of initial assessment to plan learning and ensure that apprentices make progress from their starting points is very good. Consequently, the vast majority of apprentices achieve their apprenticeship within agreed timescales and remain in sustained employment with National Grid.
- The progress monitoring of different groups of apprentices is thorough and systematic. As a result of the very high achievement rates, there are no identifiable gaps in the performance of different groups.
- Information, advice and guidance for apprentices are excellent. As a result, apprentices have a very clear understanding of their chosen career paths and what steps to take in order to succeed.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53457
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	140
UK head of academy	John Tyler
Telephone number	01623 872 786
Website	http://careers.nationalgrid.com/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	103	120	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the UK new talent manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Robert Hamp, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derek Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector

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