

Inspection of Western Power Distribution (South West)

Inspection dates:

26–29 October 2021

Overall effectiveness**Good**

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Apprenticeships

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Western Power Distribution (WPD) is the largest electricity distribution network operator in the United Kingdom. It has training centres based in the West Midlands and South West regions. Apprentices are based across the East and West Midlands and South West regions of England. As an employer provider, they are teaching standards-based apprenticeships at level 3 and level 4. Most level 3 craft apprentices are employed fitters, jointers and linespersons looking after underground cables, overhead lines and substations. The small number of level 4 apprentices are employed as electrical power network engineers. WPD subcontracts the teaching of the technical certificates to Stephenson College and the foundation degree to Aston University. At the time of inspection, there were 288 apprentices on roll. Of these, 277 were studying at level 3 and 11 at level 4. A new provider monitoring visit was completed in May 2019.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them well for their career with WPD. They receive good teaching from experienced and knowledgeable trainers. Apprentices benefit from a well-planned curriculum which builds on their existing skills. They quickly understand the key mathematical, electrical network and health and safety principles that are required in their jobs.

With the close support of mentors and line managers, apprentices become effective and highly valued team members. Level 4 apprentices particularly enjoy the planning and implementation of the work-based projects. Apprentices receive clear demonstrations and oral feedback on how to improve their work.

Apprentices participate in activities that support rapid personal development. Level 3 apprentices experience an outward-bound course and complete community-based projects. Most apprentices develop good team-working skills and reflect on their wider responsibilities to the community. Higher-level apprentices develop strong project management skills. They independently research new topics and introduce themselves to new areas of the business. Most apprentices develop the skills to support a range of different internal and external customers.

Apprentices enjoy their apprenticeship and their job. This is reflected in their high attendance rates and punctuality. They have a very positive attitude to their studies. They are respectful and supportive of colleagues. Some apprentices become mentors. Many apprentices stay within the business and gain promoted positions.

Apprentices feel safe in learning and work, including online. Apprentices are acutely aware of how to keep themselves physically safe at work. Not all apprentices are sufficiently aware of how they or their colleagues could be affected by threats of extremism or radicalisation within the industry.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Senior leaders have a clear and ambitious strategy for the apprenticeship programme. It is a successful component within their broad commitment to recruit and then train staff to develop the skills that are needed by the business.

Leaders and academic partners adapt and update the curriculum well to meet the needs of apprentices on different levels and career pathways. Specialist, knowledgeable and experienced trainers teach the core mathematical and scientific principles well on the intensive, initial training course. Fitters, jointers and overhead linespersons at level 3, and planning, operational and design engineers at level 4, quickly use this knowledge appropriately in their specialist workplaces.

Curriculum leaders develop a rich curriculum with additional challenging academic qualifications and opportunities for personal development. Staff rightly make health and safety a priority throughout the course, and it is taught well.

With the support of line managers, mentors and work colleagues, apprentices swiftly demonstrate knowledge and practical and team-working skills. Off-the-job trainers, from WPD, and staff from the subcontractors, Stephenson College and Aston University, explain new knowledge well and ensures that it builds on previous learning. Most apprentices make good progress.

For example, at level 3, apprentices become competent in the maintenance of circuit-breakers and in upgrading components of the electricity distribution system. Level 4 apprentices produce complex, work-related projects which include problem-solving, modelling and detailed research. Through this work, apprentices frequently demonstrate strong project and data management skills. For example, at level 4, one apprentice modelled the impact on the network of all consumers moving towards the use of smart meters. Many apprentices show good initiative, research, planning and organisational skills in sourcing evidence for their portfolios.

Nearly all apprentices complete their apprenticeship and achieve their academic qualifications. Nearly all apprentices move into sustained employment within the company and many are promoted to jobs with increased responsibilities and pay.

At level 3, trainers do not always have a sufficiently detailed understanding of apprentices' starting points and support needs. As a result, for a small number of apprentices, trainers do not put individual support plans in place quickly enough. A few of these apprentices make slower progress.

Leaders develop and recognise the importance of personal development well. For example, they invest in training for apprentice representatives. As a result of their reports, teachers on the foundation degree have improved the frequency of written feedback on apprentices' work.

Leaders have established 'apprentice of the year' awards, which provide recognition for apprentices who have often overcome challenges to achieve their apprenticeship. This reinforces the importance the company places on the work of apprenticeships. Apprentices rightly feel proud and more confident.

Most learners have a good understanding of career opportunities within WPD. However, they do not routinely receive impartial careers guidance nor are they sufficiently aware of the wider career opportunities, or progression opportunities to further study, outside of WPD.

Governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They understand their legislative duties and have the necessary skills and experience. They use their knowledge of education and the electrical distribution sector to provide appropriate challenge and support.

Leaders use a range of actions to assure and improve the quality of the curriculum. They intervene swiftly and effectively where evidence suggests that apprentices are not completing tasks, or staff are not completing processes at the planned date.

They manage subcontractors well. However, senior leaders do not ensure that individual review and target-setting processes lead to a clear understanding of what apprentices need to do to achieve the highest grades. Too few apprentices achieve these grades.

Leaders continue to invest in high-quality training environments, which emulate current industrial practice. Apprentices respond positively in terms of good conduct and working practices.

Leaders recognise the lack of diversity within their business and the sector. They have taken actions to increase the proportion of female apprentices and those from ethnic minority groups. It is too early to see a significant impact on the profile of apprentices at level 3.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders rightly make health and safety a top priority. Staff understand and implement the required health and safety procedures.

The designated safeguarding lead and four deputies are well qualified and appropriately trained. Leaders ensure that recruitment processes for staff are in place to minimise risks to apprentices. Staff log and track safeguarding incidents and risks well. For example, leaders have identified an increase in reports of poor mental health. They have put in place appropriate information and support. For apprentices in hotels during training, leaders work with hotel managers to support apprentices and keep them safe when staying away from home.

Leaders recognise the dangers from terrorist attacks, due to the strategic importance of the business. They use risk assessments to identify emerging concerns. New apprentices understand the risks. However, some apprentices who have been on the course longer are not sufficiently clear of the dangers from extremism within this sector.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders must ensure that all apprentices understand, in the context of working at WPD, how to protect themselves, colleagues and the community from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Senior leaders must ensure that, through the review and target-setting processes, apprentices and their trainers, mentors and managers are clear about what apprentices need to do to improve and achieve the best grade possible.
- Senior leaders should provide apprentices with access to impartial careers guidance, so that apprentices are aware of wider career opportunities and further study beyond WPD.

- Managers should ensure that apprentices' starting points are gathered accurately and that they put in place any individual support needed swiftly, so that these apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55347
Address	Western Power Distribution Toll End Road Tipton West Midlands DY4 0HH
Contact number	07989 700058
Website	www.westernpower.co.uk
CEO	Philip Swift
Provider type	Employer
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Stephenson's College, Coalville Aston University

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the engineering training manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Martin Ward, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bev Ramsell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Mottram	Ofsted Inspector
Bob Busby	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2021