

Inspection of British Gas Services Limited

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 September 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

British Gas Services Limited (British Gas) recruits and trains level 2 smart meter installer apprentices and level 3 gas engineering operatives. There are currently 542 smart meter apprentices and 31 gas engineering apprentices. All the gas engineering apprentices are approaching their final assessments. At present, there are no plans to offer this standard once current apprentices have completed their final assessments.

For around the first five months of their courses, apprentices attend a training academy in Leicester, Dartford or Thatcham on a block-release basis. They spend around two thirds of their time studying at an academy and the rest of their time working alongside an experienced colleague. They gain electrical and gas safety accreditation during this period and spend the rest of their apprenticeship in the workplace.

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

Apprentices enjoy their experiences. They are proud to work for British Gas and this is reflected in the care they take over their work and the ways in which they interact with staff and each other. They are generally very satisfied with the training that they receive, although a few apprentices sometimes feel overwhelmed by the amount of information given to them in lessons.

Apprentices receive good training that equips them well for their roles as smart meter installers or gas engineers. At the completion of their apprenticeships, they are ready to work safely and independently and are prepared for further training.

As a result of the extensive work that leaders and managers undertake with industry representatives, apprentices learn about current and emerging technologies and issues, such as air-source heat pumps and hydrogen boilers.

Trainers, mentors and experienced colleagues help apprentices to develop their confidence and resilience. From the outset, staff help apprentices to communicate clearly with colleagues and customers and to deal appropriately with challenging or confrontational situations.

Leaders and managers prioritise the well-being of apprentices and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The culture of care is evident across the organisation.

Apprentices feel safe. Training staff and apprentices' colleagues have a strong focus on health and safety. Trainers introduce apprentices to safeguarding topics and apprentices know to whom they should report any concerns.

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

Leaders and managers work with industry representatives to develop apprenticeship courses that have a clear purpose and suitable content. Courses meet the increasing need for smart meter installers and gas engineers. Managers make relevant adjustments to the curriculum to respond to current national issues. For example, apprentices learn about how to spot meter tampering, which is more likely to happen as a result of the recent rises in fuel costs.

Managers and trainers plan courses well. Apprentices initially spend blocks of time in the classroom, complemented by time in the workplace with an experienced colleague. This helps apprentices to gain a sound understanding of theoretical concepts that they then learn to apply at work. Following initial training, apprentices spend their time in the workplace where they work through a range of specific activities to consolidate their skills and understanding.

The standard of training reflects the high expectations of leaders and managers. Many apprentices join the company to retrain after working in other fields. The well-

planned curriculum supports them to achieve high levels of performance.

Trainers, who are experienced engineers, have excellent subject knowledge and work experience that enables them to bring real-life examples into their teaching. They give clear explanations and demonstrations and help apprentices immediately put into practice what they have learned. They link learning well to real-life examples. They use repetition effectively to help apprentices to embed information in their long-term memories. However, although managers equip trainers with basic teaching skills, they do not do enough to support their ongoing development and this leads to a small amount of uninspiring teaching.

Apprentices benefit from excellent training resources. Training academies are exceptionally well equipped. They replicate real-life environments, and apprentices rightly value the extensive range of equipment and simulated working areas such as bathrooms and under-stairs compartments that help them to prepare for the workplace.

Trainers continually check apprentices' understanding through oral questioning, weekly quizzes, practical skills tests and short written tasks. They provide apprentices with frequent feedback through one-to-one or whole-group activities. As a result, apprentices understand how well they are doing, and trainers modify their teaching to focus on the topics that apprentices find difficult.

Apprentices complete work to a high standard and the large majority who complete their studies are successful in their final assessments. Almost all of those who take functional skills qualifications pass at the first attempt. Upon completion of their studies, apprentices remain in permanent employment and have further opportunities to develop their careers.

Apprentices attend well and participate fully in their training. Trainers introduce apprentices to British Gas's code of conduct during the first week of their studies and provide supplementary ground rules for classroom behaviour. Centre delivery managers monitor attendance and punctuality carefully and deal appropriately with any causes for concern.

Managers provide apprentices with a range of tools to help them to stay physically and mentally healthy. For example, apprentices have access to nutritionists and counsellors and can take advantage of a reduced-price gym membership. Trainers undertake useful online learning courses on topics such as drugs and alcohol, avoiding scams and mental and emotional well-being at work. This helps them to speak confidently to apprentices about the challenges that they may face in the workplace or their daily lives.

Staff provide apprentices with suitable guidance about careers within the gas industry, especially those within British Gas. However, initial guidance has not always made clear to apprentices the nature of the work or the environments in which they will find themselves. This has resulted in too many apprentices dropping out. Managers have recently strengthened initial advice and guidance, but it is too early

to gauge the impact of changes.

Most apprentices benefit from workplace activities that are well planned and complement their classroom learning. However, some apprentices work for managers or alongside colleagues who do not fully understand the apprenticeship. Consequently, these colleagues do not provide the required level of support. Managers have recognised this and have recently made a substantial investment in workplace mentors, but it is too early to see the impact.

Managers have not yet developed good systems for identifying apprentices' additional learning needs and providing them with extra help. Staff rely on apprentices telling them if they need any additional support. Trainers do not receive any training to help them to spot particular learning difficulties. When apprentices disclose a learning difficulty, managers arrange professional assessments of their needs, but trainers do not then receive training in how to provide support.

Leaders and managers have made only basic arrangements for the quality assurance of courses. Standardisation activity focuses overly on administrative requirements and compliance. Lesson observations do not focus enough on the key elements of teaching that will help apprentices to retain and recall their learning. Leaders and managers have recently sought external support to tackle this, but it is too early to judge the impact.

Senior leaders across the wider organisation provide effective support and challenge to managers. They help to make sure that apprentices feel part of the company, have high-quality equipment and can access the full range of employee benefits. They raise appropriate concerns about the quality of training and ensure improvement actions are set.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, managers and trainers take a robust approach to safety and well-being. They undertake thorough investigations of any safety incidents, identify the causes of problems and take action to ensure that they do not recur. They provide good support for apprentices who study away from home.

Managers conduct appropriate pre-employment checks for all staff who may work alone with apprentices. They provide staff with suitable training in a range of safeguarding themes and many trainers become safeguarding confidants. Managers have established a clear referral system so that safeguarding concerns are not overlooked.

Apprentices undertake appropriate health and safety and safeguarding training. They receive personal safety alarms, undertake additional safer driving instruction and can access a health and safety helpline. They know how to spot and report concerns that they encounter when working in customers' homes.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should strengthen arrangements for identifying any additional learning needs that apprentices might have. They should provide training for staff to help them to recognise these needs and give appropriate support where required.
- Leaders and managers should strengthen quality assurance arrangements so that they focus more on the quality of education. They should use these arrangements to identify and provide additional training that would help trainers to become more accomplished teachers.
- Leaders and managers should closely monitor the new workplace mentoring arrangements to ensure that they deliver the anticipated improvements to apprentices' workplace experiences.
- Leaders and managers should develop arrangements to provide apprentices with impartial careers information, advice and guidance about the full range of opportunities available within the sector.
- Leaders and managers should monitor the impact of improved initial advice and guidance on the retention of apprentices, and adjust it where necessary.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50855
Address	Aylestone Road Leicester LE2 7QH
Contact number	02072741052
Website	www.britishgas.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Chris Jackson
Provider type	Employer
Date of previous inspection	9 July 2007
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the early careers 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

Russ Henry, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Vicki Locke	His Majesty's Inspector
Kevin Williams	Ofsted Inspector
David Baber	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Scanlan	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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