

INSPECTION REPORT

National Grid (Transco)

13 October 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. National Grid owns the high-voltage electricity transmission system in England and Wales and operates the system across Great Britain. It has substations at over 300 sites and has 2,781 employees working in the transmission part of the business. National Grid also owns and operates the high-pressure gas transmission system and local distribution networks that deliver gas to homes and businesses throughout Britain. In 2002 National Grid and Transco merged to become National Grid Transco and in July 2005 the company changed its name to National Grid.

2. National Grid has an engineering training centre in Eakring, a small village near Newark in Nottinghamshire. The centre provides training in the areas of substation operation and maintenance and overhead line erection and maintenance. There are currently 59 advanced apprentices. On average, the company recruits 12 learners each year, but has recruited up to 22 learners in any one year. The annual intake depends on the National Grid's manpower requirements and is planned well in advance. All learners are employed by the company. Training is offered on a residential block-release basis over a three-year period. The training centre is an approved national vocational qualification (NVQ) assessment centre.

3. The training centre covers an area of approximately 200 acres and has an extensive range of training resources with a team of staff who have extensive technical knowledge. The centre offers a number of training schemes, including the advanced apprenticeship in engineering, to employees of National Grid. A programme manager is responsible for four full-time training staff and an additional three staff who contribute to the delivery of the apprenticeship programme. National Grid also offer apprenticeships to gas trainees, but this is not currently funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 1

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding.** More specifically, National Grid's leadership and management are outstanding and its arrangements for quality improvement and for equality of opportunity are good. Engineering and manufacturing technologies programmes are outstanding.

5. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Self-assessment is now very effective. The latest self-assessment report was produced in September 2005, immediately preceding the inspection, and provides a very accurate view of the provision. Key strengths from the previous inspection in 2002 have been maintained. Self-assessment arrangements are consultative. The production of the self-assessment report is well planned and ensures timely action. The report contains useful links to suitable evidence and is appropriately authored by the New Talent Team scheme managers, supported by consultation with key staff and learners' questionnaires.

NATIONAL GRID (TRANSCO)

6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to maintain the high quality of provision. It has taken decisive action to improve quality. Since the previous inspection, all of the key weaknesses and other aspects identified as needing improvement at that time have been dealt with, and most have been significantly improved. Quality assurance arrangements are now improved, with better monitoring and more effective collection of feedback enabling direct action to improve quality. The use of data has improved and National Grid has started to produce periodic reports on the quality of training and on the results of its recruitment and selection process. Data reports are suitably analysed by managers and discussed with staff.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL GRID (TRANSCO):

- maintain the high retention and achievement rates
- maintain the quality of provision while widening the range of disciplines
- maintain the focus on improvement
- continue to increase participation from under-represented groups
- improve the quality of teaching

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Leadership and management		1
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Engineering			1
Apprenticeships for young people	59		1

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. National Grid offers only one area of learning, engineering, and this was inspected and reported upon. The inspection focused on the programmes delivered in-house at National Grid, Eakring which currently provides training for 59 young people. Inspectors visited National Grid for one day before the final inspection visit, to observe the induction of new learners.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	7
Number of learners interviewed	40
Number of staff interviewed	24
Number of employers interviewed	2
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	4
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Retention and achievement rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme are very good.** Of the 60 learners starting since 2002-03, 58 are still in learning. The achievement rate for key skills qualifications is excellent, with all learners obtaining key skills at level 2 by the end of the first year of training. Learners all complete their framework within three years, one year earlier than the expected period for this framework. All current learners are making excellent progress towards achieving their qualifications.

9. Learners work to a very high standard. From the outset of their on-the-job training, learners work to the exacting standards of the electricity transmission industry. As members of work teams they carry out a variety of maintenance and installation activities on overhead lines or transmission substations. Key milestones of achievement are agreed with learners when completing their individual learning plans. Learners quickly become valued members of the maintenance teams, displaying excellent practical skills and a thorough understanding of theoretical concepts while still developing their skills and gaining experience.

10. **Career progression for learners is very good.** Retention of learners in the company following completion of their apprenticeship is excellent. A significant number of learners progress after completion to positions of responsibility in maintenance engineering and planning. Many learners progress to higher-level qualifications and through the management structure of the company. National Grid has a very effective strategy to encourage learners to maximise their potential. Learners are encouraged and supported to continue their studies beyond national certificate level up to higher national certificate and

degree level.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	0	1	4	0	5
Total	0	1	4	0	5

11. Learners benefit greatly from an excellent and comprehensive induction programme. During induction learners are introduced in detail to all aspects of the programme including the training, learning and assessment processes. Learners are introduced to and tested for key skills. If additional support needs are identified, National Grid uses Walsall College to provide literacy and numeracy skills support material and teaching.

12. Resources to support learning and training are excellent. The Eakring training centre has an extensive range of background knowledge and practical training resources. All training rooms are comfortable, spacious and well equipped. A range of outdoor tower structures and strung training lines, representing a variety of conductor configurations, provides good facilities for learners receiving training in overhead line maintenance. Substation operation and maintenance training is provided in a working substation. National Grid provides each learner with a comprehensive toolkit and other engineering and personal protection equipment needed for their training and work activities.

13. National Grid provides outstanding levels of technical and pastoral support for learners. At the time of the inspection, nine assessors and one trainee assessor supported training. Each learner has a personal mentor in the workplace who works with them throughout their programme. The mentors are trained in this role at the training centre. Learners receive very effective progress reviews every 10 weeks. The arrangements for assessment are satisfactory. All learners are supplied with laptop computers and mobile phones. Learners have access to first-class leisure facilities including use of the centre's own golf course and fishing lake.

14. Teaching is satisfactory. All off-the-job training modules are accompanied by comprehensive session plans detailing the activities to be completed. Relevant learning objectives and outcomes are developed.

Leadership and management

15. National Grid have a very strong strategic commitment to training. The company commits extensive funds to supporting training each year and to running its training centre in Eakring. Clear and effective links exist between National Grid's key business drivers, staff training and development, and apprenticeship programmes. The New Talent Team has clearly defined strategic objectives based on recruitment and resourcing, talent development, talent retention and talent utilisation. The development plan has a clear risk-assessment section where key risks are identified along with associated management actions.

16. National Grid is very strongly committed to health and safety. Learners judged to

need additional driving safety awareness are given extra tuition. All travel, training and leisure activities involving learners are risk-assessed. As an integral part of their training, learners are expected to risk-assess all practical exercises. Learners display a very good understanding of health and safety in the workplace.

17. Management of training is very good. Since the previous inspection, National Grid has restructured the management of its training provision. Programme design and planning is extremely thorough. New Talent Team staff work closely with National Grid's business units and technical contract providers to ensure the content of apprenticeship programmes meets the requirements of the business. A detailed annual learning plan is produced and circulated to all key stakeholders. The Eakring management meeting receives frequent reports summarising apprentices' progress and on the performance of the training teams. Monthly joint training provider meetings are used successfully to monitor subcontractors' performance and report on the progress of each learner.

18. National Grid has good initiatives to widen participation. It is involved in national and regional initiatives to encourage women and members of minority ethnic groups into engineering. It closely monitors its own selection policies and practices, and analyses recruitment to ensure that its strategies are widening participation successfully.

19. Self-assessment is now very effective. Excellent resources to support learning is still a strength as is excellent support for learners. Self-assessment arrangements are satisfactory and consultative. Although workplace supervisors and learners are not directly involved in the process, their views are collected through the learners' progress reviews carried out every 10 weeks, the mentors' progress reports and learners' questionnaires. National Grid's management of assessment and internal verification is satisfactory. Learners consider assessments to be fair and accurate and receive good feedback.

20. Quality improvement arrangements are well documented in a New Talent Team apprenticeship scheme quality improvement manual and in the Eakring Technical Training Centre Quality Procedures. **National Grid's monitoring of subcontractors is highly effective.** Detailed and effective service level agreements are in place with all subcontractors and clearly document National Grid's expectations. The company's management effectively monitor all aspects of the learners' experience through observations and frequent collection of learners' feedback.

21. National Grid does not effectively communicate back to stakeholders the actions it has taken to improve provision. The company acts quickly on feedback from learners and other stakeholders, but has no mechanism to inform stakeholders of the improvements made.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong strategic commitment to training
- very good attention to health and safety
- good initiatives to widen participation
- highly effective monitoring of subcontractors

NATIONAL GRID (TRANSCO)

- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- slow communication of response to learners' feedback

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Engineering

Grade 1

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- excellent progression
- comprehensive and effective induction
- excellent learning resources
- outstanding support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NATIONAL GRID (TRANSCO):

- being part of a team
- 'the course is brilliant'
- working onsite and practical work outdoors
- learning new skills
- 'the practical training'
- the teambuilding at induction
- visiting France to learn about their methods
- having a mentor
- the good recreational facilities to stop them getting bored
- 'the course is absolutely wicked and I am well pleased'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NATIONAL GRID (TRANSCO) COULD IMPROVE:

- communication following feedback
- the amount of practical work
- the time provided for working on site
- the gaps in programmes - there could be fewer
- the time given with mentors
- the quality of the smoking areas
- the timing of the 'drive and survive' course - it could be earlier in the programme
- 'some learners get more and better 'kit' than others'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

Strengths

- strong strategic commitment to training
- very good attention to health and safety
- good initiatives to widen participation
- highly effective monitoring of subcontractors
- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- slow communication of response to learners' feedback

22. The National Grid training centre in Eakring is a part of the human resources department of National Grid. The New Talent manager, who reports to the human resources director, is responsible for National Grid's new talent pathways and widening participation initiatives. The New Talent Team scheme manager reports to the New Talent manager and is responsible for apprenticeship recruitment, scheme design and delivery, along with quality assurance and quality improvement processes. The technical training manager, who also reports to the human resources director, allocates a programme manager to monitor scheme activities in line with annually reviewed service level agreements established and managed by the New Talent scheme manager. National Grid offers training on a residential block-release basis over a three-year period. The training centre is an approved NVQ assessment centre. The most recent self-assessment report was prepared and updated in September 2005, immediately preceding the inspection.

23. National Grid has a very strong strategic commitment to training. The company commits extensive funds to supporting training each year and to running its training centre in Eakring. The strategic plan clearly commits to training through to the year 2012 and there are firm agreed figures for ongoing recruitment of apprentices for the next five years. The five-year planning is maintained by consulting with the business units each year to obtain apprentice recruitment forecasts within each area. Managers have a very good strategic direction and learning has an important focus and a high priority within the company. Clear and effective links exist between National Grid's key business drivers, staff training and development, and apprenticeship programmes. National Grid's Talent Pathway clearly identifies the routes of progression from the age of nine through to the age of 25 and then ultimately to the company's talent pool. The New Talent Team has clearly defined strategic objectives which are supported by the four strategic platforms of recruitment and resourcing, talent development, talent retention and talent utilisation. Staff members' personal objectives are closely aligned to these platforms. The strategic plan is well supported by a three-year development plan which contains clear targets for recruitment, including recruitment from under-represented groups. The development plan has a clear risk-assessment section where key risks are identified along with associated management actions. There is a very clear focus on the development and progression of learners.

24. The company places a very strong emphasis on high standards of health and safety. Safety is an overriding priority in all of the apprentice training arrangements and an integral part of every aspect of the programme. The company regards it a high priority to instil in every employee a good awareness and understanding of the importance of operating within a safe environment in which all employees, including learners, have a responsibility for themselves and those around them. The apprenticeship programme builds this awareness and understanding very effectively, starting with the induction course, and continues to develop it to a very high standard throughout the training programme. Learners receive additional training and qualifications in an extensive range of health and safety-related topics, including first aid, working safely, manual handling, working at heights and fire prevention. Of particular value to learners is their attendance at training sessions on safe and defensive driving techniques that include practical risk assessment of their driving skills. Learners judged to need additional driving safety awareness are given extra tuition. All travel, training and leisure activities involving learners are extensively risk-assessed, as is every off-the-job training module. As an integral part of their training learners are expected to carry out their own risk-assessments on all practical exercises. All work activities on the job on-site are risk-assessed and must comply with strict industry safety processes that include permit for works, process sheets and authorisation by competent persons. Learners speak of this training being so effective that they transfer this close attention to good health and safety practices to their leisure and domestic activities. One learner in particular said he always uses personal safety equipment when working on his car or doing jobs around his home. All learners displayed an excellent understanding of health and safety in the workplace.

25. The management of subcontractors is very good and focuses clearly on learners' progress and achievement. Joint monthly meetings are held with all three subcontractors, which are required to produce detailed management information to enable effective monitoring of learners' progress. A detailed contract and a comprehensive service level agreement are in place for each subcontractor. The service level agreement clearly identifies the responsibilities of each partner. It also indicates that National Grid will carry out audits of all processes involving learners, which are identified in the apprenticeship quality strategy. National Grid monitors the effectiveness of all aspects of the learners' experience by carrying out observations of subcontractors' performance and seeking learners' feedback frequently. Each training module is evaluated by learners and feedback is provided to National Grid for action.

26. Management of training is excellent. Since the previous inspection, National Grid has restructured the management of its training provision. The overall management of the apprenticeship programme rests with National Grid's human resource director. The New Talent Team ensures scheme management and individual employees' roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and role definitions are easily accessible to all staff. The New Talent Team is also responsible for the effective management of subcontractors, including direct delivery at the Eaking centre which is now managed as subcontracted provision. Programme design and planning is very thorough. New Talent Team staff work very closely with National Grid's business units and technical contract providers to ensure the content of apprenticeship programmes meets the requirements of the business. A very detailed annual learning plan is produced and circulated to all key stakeholders including learners, their mentors, trainers and staff responsible for learners' accommodation while at Eaking. The plan, based on a weekly timetable, incorporates each training provider's own timetable and includes extensive details on individual courses, venues, trainers, progress

reviews and accommodation requirements. The plan is issued to all parties six weeks before the start of each year of training. A very effective management structure exists to support learning. Communications are excellent and frequent meetings occur at all levels to discuss the apprenticeship programme. Meetings are well minuted and actions suitably recorded and progressed. The Eakring management meeting receives frequent reports on progress summaries for each learner and on the performance of the training teams. Scheme managers are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each learner and act swiftly to ensure effective support is available whenever required. Monthly joint training providers' meetings successfully monitor subcontractors' performance and report on the progress of each learner. An apprentice's steering group meets quarterly to discuss strategic direction, recruitment and scheme development and was suitably involved in the production of the self-assessment report. National Grid has recently introduced innovative 'delivery packs' as a new initiative to promote standardisation and improve standards. These packs are issued two weeks before the start of a course and are effective in ensuring that key documents are referenced and/or completed by trainers. A course control sheet within each pack ensures that all required actions from planning to certification are carried out and appropriately recorded. All actions are closely monitored.

27. National Grid does not effectively communicate improvements or actions taken to secure improvement back to stakeholders. Although the company acts effectively on feedback received from learners and other stakeholders and in improving provision, it has no mechanism to inform stakeholders of improvements made. Learners rely on informal mechanisms and information from other groups of learners to find out what actions have been taken. Many learners are frustrated that their views are sought but not recognised or reported upon when National Grid subsequently takes action.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

28. National Grid has good initiatives to widen participation. The company recognises that the electricity transmission industry traditionally has had low levels of recruitment of members of minority groups and women. The company is involved in national and regional initiatives to encourage under-represented groups into engineering. As an ongoing activity in its campaign to improve inclusion and diversity National Grid closely monitors and analyses its recruitment and selection of under-represented groups to ensure that its strategies are producing benefits. The company closely monitors its own selection and recruitment procedures, policies and practices to ensure that they comply with best practice. Managers are provided with a breakdown of applicants according to gender, race and disability, and corresponding information on applicants who are short listed. National Grid is taking action to improve the numbers applying and being short listed from minority groups. Data on participation by under-represented groups indicates that National Grid's strategies are resulting in increased participation, although the levels are still low. One unusual aspect of the recent effect on recruitment is that fewer under-represented applications have been received but that the relative success rate of candidates from under-represented groups has improved. National Grid is well aware of inclusion and diversity and has actively responded to trends for under-represented groups. The company works closely with recruitment organisations that specialise in diversity to target both ethnicity and gender in its apprentice attraction campaign. Improving and maintaining the diversity profile is a key performance indicator monitored by National Grid. The company works closely with universities and schools to promote and support engineering at all levels. National Grid's staff attend careers fairs and graduate fairs and are using their growing relationship with Connexions to challenge stereotypical perceptions of engineering. The

company has targeted substantial minority ethnic networks through a range of initiatives. It has distributed job bulletins to over 3,500 young minority ethnic job seekers and hosted a joint seminar at the London Education Conference attended by most of the black Members of Parliament and government ministers and over 1,000 children, parents and teachers. National Grid also advertises in diversity-specific publications and is piloting targeted radio advertising. The proportion of apprenticeship applicants who are women has remained constant over the past two years at 1.4 per cent, and the proportion of applicants who are from minority ethnic groups has fallen from 27 per cent in 2004-05 to 15 per cent in 2005-06. However, the proportion of women recruited has risen from zero per cent in 2004-05 to 10 per cent in 2005-06 and the proportion of learners recruited from minority ethnic communities has increased from 1.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 4 per cent in 2005-06.

29. The company gives equality of opportunity a high priority. Since the previous inspection National Grid has continued to raise the awareness of the importance of equality of opportunity throughout the whole company with a group-wide campaign. This effective campaign to promote the importance of inclusion and diversity to the business was launched in January 2005. Every employee, including learners, was provided with an information pack. National Grid's equal opportunities policy is comprehensive, explains all relevant legal requirements and is reviewed and updated regularly. The policy was reinforced by the creation of local steering groups and the development of the company intranet sites to provide specific information. National Grid has a clear policy on its intention and commitment to develop and operate the business in a way that creates a more inclusive and diverse culture.

30. At induction, learners receive extensive training on the company's approach to inclusion and diversity which is reinforced successfully through the teambuilding activities. Information given to learners is clearly presented and covers harassment, bullying and grievance procedures. Learners are fairly treated by National Grid and feel valued and respected as members of teams. They describe their workplaces as friendly and supportive. Learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities is good.

31. Learners' awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity is reinforced and reviewed throughout their programme at the progress review meetings held every 10 weeks. The learners are asked specific questions on equality of opportunity, which are varied at each review. If learners are unclear then the reviewer provides advice and guidance on the subject. Learners' understanding is recorded on the review form. All staff at National Grid receive regular training in inclusion and diversity. In particular, training centre staff, mentors and workplace supervisors have all had comprehensive training in equality of opportunity. Subcontractors supply a copy of their equal opportunities policies to the centre when they apply for 'preferred supplier' status. All subcontractors are also given a copy of National Grid's equal opportunities policy and asked to confirm in writing that they understand and will work within the policy guidelines.

32. The Eakring centre has good access and clearly marked parking areas for people with restricted mobility. There are accessible toilets for disabled people. The electrical transmission industry involves a high level of physical mobility, working at height on transmission pylons and with lethal voltages in confined spaces. The inherent risk management in the industry prevents people with restricted mobility being employed on-site. Nonetheless, National Grid provides a wide range of employment opportunities for people with disabilities in other parts of the company.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

33. The company has taken decisive action to improve quality. Since the previous inspection, all of the key weaknesses and other aspects identified as needing improvement at that time have been dealt with, and most have been significantly improved. Quality assurance arrangements are now improved with better monitoring and more effective collecting of feedback leading to direct action to improve quality. Key skills are now effectively delivered in the first six months of the engineering programme, with good links with the technical certificate and the level 2 performing engineering operations NVQ where appropriate. Assessment in the workplace is also satisfactory, with more assessment by direct observation and better feedback of progress in the workplace. Equality of opportunity is now satisfactorily reinforced through the use of careful questioning at reviews. The use of data has improved and National Grid has started to produce periodic reports on the quality of training and on the results of the recruitment and selection process. Data reports are suitably analysed by managers and discussed with staff.

34. The monitoring of subcontractors is good. Three providers are used as subcontractors to deliver training and assessment, and they have been appropriately monitored against agreed service level agreements. The service level agreements clearly document National Grid's expectations in terms of staff qualifications, quality monitoring mechanisms and the production of learners' progress reports and are clearly focused on the learners. All three providers attend monthly progress meetings to discuss all aspects of provision but particularly to provide National Grid with detailed individual progress reports for each learner on all aspects of their programme. All subcontractors are required to carry out thorough learning session observations of their training sessions and National Grid also carries out further observations of training sessions, reviews and assessment. Observation checklists have been produced and nine staff have been trained to carry out observations. However, the production of action plans following observations is not sufficiently developed. Auditing of arrangements takes place frequently and learners' feedback is appropriately collected on completion of learning modules. Feedback is analysed by managers and actions for improvements are set in place.

35. Self-assessment is now very effective. The most recent self-assessment report provides a very accurate view of the provision. Key strengths from the previous inspection have been maintained, as have the high retention and achievement rates. Excellent resources to support learning are still a strength, as is the excellent support for learners. Good strategic and operational management remain strengths. Self-assessment arrangements are consultative. The production of the self-assessment report is well planned and ensures timely action. The report contains useful links to suitable evidence and is appropriately authored by the New Talent Team scheme managers, supported by consultation with key staff and learners' questionnaires. The draft report is shared with internal customers and the training team. Subcontracted training providers are required to produce their own annual self-assessment reports to contribute to National Grid's report. Although workplace supervisors and learners are not directly involved in the process, their views are collected through the 10-week reviews, the mentors' progress reports and learners' questionnaires. The most recent self-assessment report, amended in September 2005, identifies many of the strengths identified by the inspection team but is too critical in terms of weaknesses. The report grades engineering, leadership and management and equality of opportunity as good but grades quality improvement as satisfactory. Inspectors judged the grades within the self-assessment report to be too cautious. The associated improvement plan is adequate in identifying actions to resolve the weaknesses. Previous improvement plans

have been regularly reviewed and updated despite interruptions enforced by the merger of National Grid and Transco in 2002.

36. The management of assessment and internal verification is satisfactory. External verifiers' reports are positive, with standards agreed and action points suitably carried out. Learners consider assessments to be fair and accurate and receive good feedback.

37. Quality improvement arrangements are documented well in a New Talent Team apprenticeship scheme quality improvement manual and in the Eakring technical training centre quality procedures. Quality improvement procedures and documents are available for all staff to reference on an easily navigable computer-based system. The manuals adequately set out procedures for all aspects of the management and quality assurance of learning, from recruitment to the end-of-apprenticeship review. Staff members' and management responsibilities in relation to quality improvement are clearly defined. The manual is reviewed annually.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering Apprenticeships for young people	59	1 1

38. National Grid has 59 learners studying for advanced apprenticeships in electricity system technology engineering. All learners have employed status. Learners recruited onto the scheme train in installing and maintaining electricity transmission substation plant and apparatus, or erecting and maintaining steel tower overhead lines. Thirty-eight learners are working towards an NVQ in substation plant installation and maintenance at level 3 and 21 learners are working towards a level 3 NVQ in overhead lines installation and maintenance. National Grid's advanced apprenticeship scheme has been developed specifically for the electricity industry's Sector Skills Council.

39. The programme consists of off-the-job training at the Eakring training centre and on-the-job training at regional locations throughout England and Wales. Learners on the installation and maintenance of substation plant programme spend 70 weeks at Eakring during the three-year programme, and the learners on the erection and maintenance of overhead lines spend 66 weeks there.

40. A recent addition to the programme has been the introduction of an NVQ in performing engineering operations at level 2 for all advanced apprentices. The first group of learners to study for the qualification are the learners in overhead lines maintenance who started in 2005-06.

Engineering

Grade 1

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- excellent progression
- comprehensive and effective induction
- excellent learning resources
- outstanding support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

41. Retention and achievement rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme are consistently very good. Twenty-four of the 31 learners who started their training between 1999-2000 and 2001-02 completed their advanced apprenticeship framework. Of the 60 learners starting since 2002-03, 58 are still in learning. The achievement rate for key skills

qualifications is excellent, with all learners obtaining key skills at level 2 by the end of the first year of training. Learners all complete their framework within three years - one year earlier than the expected period for this framework. All current learners are making excellent progress towards achieving their qualifications and all are expected to achieve within the three-year period.

42. Career progression for learners is very good. Retention of learners in the company following completion of their apprenticeship is excellent. Five years after completion of their framework nearly 90 per cent of former learners still remain with the company. A significant number of learners progress after completion to positions of responsibility in maintenance engineering and planning. All learners are given the opportunity to progress to higher-level qualifications and through the management structure of the company. National Grid has an effective strategy to encourage learners to maximise their potential. It has developed an additional route within the apprenticeship programme, which enables learners with distinction and good grades at the end of their second year to study for a national certificate in their third year. Learners are encouraged and supported to continue their studies beyond national certificate level up to higher national certificate and degree level.

43. The standard of learners' practical work during on-the-job training is very high and meets the demanding requirements of the electricity transmission industry. From the outset of on-the-job training learners work to the electricity transmission industry's exacting standards as members of work teams on a variety of maintenance and installation activities on overhead lines or transmission substations. Learners quickly become valued members of the maintenance teams and make a useful contribution to the company while still developing their skills and gaining experience. Safety standards in the electricity transmission industry are very high and learners are taught to work with confidence and extreme care in carrying out maintenance operations on high voltage plant or at height on pylons and cables. Learners display excellent practical skills and a comprehensive understanding of the background knowledge required.

44. There is very detailed monitoring of learners' progress. Key milestones of achievement are agreed with learners when completing their individual learning plans. Managers are able to monitor learners' progress towards these milestones using management information in the form of data spreadsheets. Learners benefit from being able to plan their work schedules and to agree with their supervisors suitable periods of deployment to other locations to gain additional evidence for aspects of their NVQs. National Grid is effective in ensuring learners gain experience on other sites to broaden their experience and understanding even beyond the requirements of the framework. Learners make excellent use of the evidence they collect during their on-the-job training to compile their portfolios, which are neat and very well presented. Portfolios contain excellent evidence of achievement and vocational competence, with well-structured task assignments and descriptions of work that are illustrated effectively with high-quality digital photographs and examples of worksheets.

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The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Advanced apprenticeships	LSC funded work-based learning															
	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	15		22		8		15		8	100	9	100	14	100		
Retained*	0		0		0		0		7	88	8	89	10	71		
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0		7	88	7	78	10	71		
Still in learning	15		22		8		13		0	0	1	11	0	0		

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

45. Learners benefit greatly from an excellent and comprehensive induction programme. Before the start of the programme, parents and guardians are invited to visit the Eakring training centre and the residential accommodation for a site tour and to meet key staff and learn about the programme and the company. This very effective arrangement makes the transition from home to living away much easier for learners and their families. During induction, learners are introduced in detail to all aspects of the programme including the training, learning and assessment processes. This comprehensive introduction enables learners to be quickly integrated with the company. At induction learners are introduced to their administration support team and their individual mentors. One key aim of induction is to instil learners' recognition of their personal responsibility for the success of their own learning. Learners are encouraged from the start to take an active role in their own development. The importance of high standards of health and safety are strongly emphasised from the outset of the induction programme, and are reinforced throughout the apprenticeship. Learners speak enthusiastically about their participation in a variety of team building activities during induction which include a residential course at an outdoor adventure training centre. They are encouraged to develop their communication skills by working together on presentations to training staff and senior management. Further interest and relevance to their future training programme is added by visits to power stations and electricity substations during induction.

46. Resources to support learning and training are excellent. The Eakring training centre has an extensive range of background knowledge and practical training resources. All training rooms are comfortable, spacious and well equipped. Practical workshops and practical training areas meet industry standards and prepare learners well for working in the industry. The modern purpose-built accommodation includes well-equipped classrooms and technical training workshops providing a wide range of plant and equipment, such as primary plant, and protection and control equipment. A range of outdoor tower structures and strung training lines representing a variety of conductor configurations provide good facilities for learners receiving training in overhead line maintenance. Substation operation and maintenance training is provided in a working substation. There are further workshops for training on cables, scaffolding, rigging and slinging. Learners have access to well-equipped learning centres furnished with internet computer suites and a variety of modern learning packages in video and CD/DVD formats. National Grid provides each learner with a comprehensive toolkit and other engineering and personal protection equipment needed for their training and work activities. After completing their initial period of off-the-job training, most learners are provided with a vehicle during their

on-the-job training phase on site.

47. Assessors and internal verifiers are suitably qualified and experienced. At the time of the inspection, nine assessors and one trainee assessor supported training. The assessors all hold assessor accreditation, and the trainee assessor was working towards their qualifications. Two internal verifiers hold internal verification awards and two of the assessors are about to start training in internal verification. The company has also demonstrated good practice in training all assessors for a level 3 NVQ in learning and development, but this is a recent initiative and none of the assessors has yet achieved the award.

48. National Grid provides outstanding technical and pastoral support for learners. Each learner has a personal mentor in the workplace who works with them throughout their programme. The mentors are trained in this role at the training centre and are introduced to the learners during the initial induction week. Most mentors are former apprentices and are very familiar with the apprenticeship scheme, and all have extensive industry experience that enables them to provide learners with very effective personal support on site. Learners receive detailed progress reviews every 10 weeks. The progress review arrangements are very effective in monitoring learners' progress. They also contribute significantly to the high levels of support given to learners in the coverage of health and safety issues, raising learners' awareness of equality of opportunity and identifying any pastoral care needs. There is outstanding support for learners who have been off work through illness or any other reason. One learner, who was badly injured in a motoring accident that necessitated long periods in hospital and in convalescence, received significant support and assistance throughout his recovery. He was very effectively rehabilitated into work, initially through light duties, and is now almost back on schedule in his programme. Another learner was unable to continue working on overhead lines because of an injury and had an extended period of treatment and rehabilitation. He has been transferred successfully to the substation maintenance programme to allow him to complete his apprenticeship and remain a valued employee within the company.

49. Learners have access to a 24-hour telephone helpline which provides them and their families with confidential professional counselling and legal advice relating to company and personal issues. Additional good support for learners is available through a support network which was established by the company and is run by new starters for new starters. The support network has an intranet. The aim of the network is to enhance new starters' business awareness, broaden their network of contacts and provide opportunities for them to get involved in activities other than those offered by their individual roles. Apprentices have representatives on the network committee who are released from daily operations to enable them to co-ordinate network activities on behalf of all new starters. All learners are supplied with laptop computers and mobile phones. Learners are given a subsidy to cover the expense of using their mobile phones to enable them to contact their mentors at any time without worrying about the cost of calls.

50. Learners attending the Eakring centre are accommodated in a modern residential lodge which has 60 good-quality study bedrooms with en-suite facilities including computers with internet access and games consoles. Learners have access to first-class leisure facilities. The residential accommodation includes a bar, lounge, fitness centre and games room. All meals are provided in an excellent on-site restaurant. Learners can use the centre's own golf course and fishing lake. All learners have the opportunity to take advantage of the

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company's employee share scheme. Learners have free use of telephones within their bedrooms for up to two hours each evening to contact their families and friends.

51. The arrangements for assessment are satisfactory. Assessment is flexible and learners can arrange transfers between sites to gain additional experience to support their evidence collection. Learners generate a wide variety of evidence including extensive use of workplace documents, process sheets and maintenance sheets. The assessment arrangements meet the awarding body's requirements with 40 per cent of assessments being by direct observation in the workplace. Part of every unit in the qualification is assessed by direct observation. Internal verification is satisfactory and the National Grid's internal verification policy and its candidate packs have been regarded as examples of good practice by the awarding body.

52. Teaching is satisfactory. Of the five sessions observed, all were good or satisfactory. All off-the-job training modules are accompanied by comprehensive learning session plans detailing the activities to be completed, the resources to be used and the key skills that may be encountered. Mastercopies of all taught sessions are retained and reviewed regularly following course reviews and feedback. Relevant learning objectives and outcomes are developed from the technical specification laid down for the particular NVQ. As a common component of all modules, review and preview sessions provide the learner with good opportunities to share personal targets for their progress with the trainer. This session also ensures that the trainer fully understands the learner's prior knowledge and also any additional support requirements before module delivery.

53. Learners are introduced to, and tested for, key skills at induction, if they do not already hold proxy qualifications. Although National Grid does not test learners specifically for literacy, numeracy and language skills, it makes effective use of the results of the key skills tests and the results of the recruitment tests to assess learners' additional learning support needs. When a learner is identified as requiring additional support, National Grid uses the services of Walsall College to provide specialist teaching and support material.

Leadership and management

54. The engineering programme is led very well. National Grid places great value and importance on its apprenticeship programme and has made a firm commitment to ensuring its success. There is a very strong emphasis on instilling and maintaining very high standards of health and safety awareness in learners. Resources for training and learning are excellent. Learners benefit from outstanding levels of technical and pastoral support which the company manages very effectively. Staff are enthusiastic and understand their roles and responsibilities. Operational management is very effective and very responsive to any issues affecting the quality of the provision.

