

British Gas Engineering Academy

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Contents

Background information	3
Inspection judgements	3
Scope of the inspection.....	3
Description of the provider.....	4
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement.....	6
Effectiveness of provision	6
Capacity to improve	6
Key strengths	7
Key areas for improvement.....	7
Main findings	7
Achievement and standards	8
Quality of provision.....	8
Leadership and management	9
Equality of opportunity	9
What learners like:.....	11
What learners think could improve:	11
Learners' achievements	12

Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Construction, planning and the built environment

Description of the provider

1. British Gas Engineering Academy (the academy) was formed in January 2003, in response to the company's need to recruit 5,000 new gas engineers over the following five years. The gas installation and maintenance industry has an acute skills shortage. The academy is part of British Gas, which is a subsidiary of Centrica plc. The academy has centres in Acton, Dartford, Newcastle, Northampton, Leeds and Thatcham, Berkshire. It also has a centre in Glasgow which was not included in this inspection.
2. The head of British Gas Services Academy provides strategic direction for the academy. He reports to the director of human resources. The national training manager and the national resourcing manager provide senior management support. Four regional training managers, seven academy centre managers, 59 training officers and a team of technical assistants and support staff have day-to-day operational responsibility for the academy. There are 302 work-based assessors and 32 internal verifiers.
3. The academy has a contract to provide training with the national employer service of the LSC. Learners are recruited from across the country. Only learners with at least four GCSEs or their equivalent are recruited to the academy's training programmes.
4. The academy provides advanced apprenticeship training for 334 learners. Currently 192 apprentices are following the domestic gas maintenance training programme and 142 are working towards the domestic gas installation programme. They are required to complete an online application and assessment. Successful applicants are offered an appointment as a trainee gas engineer. Most learners complete the programme in 12 to 18 months. Learners on the maintenance training programmes attend an academy centre for 32 weeks and those on the installation training programme attend for 28 weeks. Learners spend the remaining time in the workplace working alongside qualified gas engineers. Learners work towards additional qualifications in unvented hot water systems and energy efficiency.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Construction, planning and the built environment	Outstanding: Grade 1
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all outstanding. Provision in construction, planning and the built environment is also outstanding. Equality of opportunity is good. The academy's response to social inclusion is good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. The academy has demonstrated outstanding capacity to improve. Good progress has been made to improve the provision since the previous inspection. All of the identified weaknesses have been successfully resolved. Training in construction remains outstanding. Success rates are excellent and continue to improve. Leadership and management and quality improvement arrangements are now outstanding. Equality of opportunity, judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection, is now good. The quality improvement plan clearly identifies the company's key strengths and areas for improvement. Actions are well-monitored by senior managers.
7. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. Staff at all levels contributed to the self-assessment report. Good use was made of information about learner recruitment and success rates to arrive at sound judgements. The views of staff and learners were taken into account. The academy's senior managers moderated the report. The academy accurately identified the strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, the academy identified three additional areas for improvement which were not considered to be significant by inspectors. Inspectors gave the same grade for all aspects of the provision as that in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- Outstanding success rates
- Very good development of technical knowledge and practical skills
- Excellent learning resources
- Well-planned and thorough National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessment
- Very well-designed programmes and activities to meet learners' needs and interests
- Excellent support for learners
- Outstanding leadership to raise achievement and support all learners
- Particularly good management and planning of training
- Effective promotional and marketing activities to recruit learners from under-represented groups
- Outstanding quality improvement strategies

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient early identification of learners' literacy and numeracy needs

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

8. Success rates are outstanding. NVQ success rates in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06 were 94%, 95% and 96% respectively. Framework success rates for the same three-year period rose from 92% to 96% with an average of 94% of learners completing their training programme on time. Outcomes for 2005-06 are particularly impressive as learner numbers rose significantly, yet the high success rates of previous years were maintained. There are no significant differences in success rates across the academy centres. In addition to the apprenticeship, learners also achieve additional qualifications in unvented hot water systems and energy efficiency programmes. All current learners are making good progress towards achieving their framework.
9. Learners develop very good technical knowledge and practical skills. Many have significant responsibility for carrying out complex tasks at work under the supervision of qualified engineers. Rigorous on- and off-the-job training helps learners to quickly develop skills in fault diagnosis and gas installation. For example, one learner changed the motorised valve on a heating system for one of a different model. He used a laptop to determine the compatibility of the valve and carried out the task neatly, altering pipe work and wiring where necessary. Another learner on the gas installation programme took responsibility for installing a complete central heating system. This included planning the layout of pipe work, positioning radiators and selecting the appropriate controls while a qualified engineer gave measured, step-by-step guidance. The academy correctly identified the strengths in achievement and standards.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. The quality of provision is outstanding. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Learning resources are excellent. Since the previous inspection, the academy has built two new centres. These centres are innovative in design and have an exceptionally good range of modern gas systems as well as older installations that learners are likely to encounter in the workplace. Work areas in centres are well-maintained and effectively replicate workplace conditions. The academy has developed good links with boiler manufacturers, who provide a range of modern boilers and equipment for training purposes. Classrooms have state of the art electronic equipment to support learning, which training officers use effectively to provide variety in lessons and maintain learners' interest. Learners have satisfactory access to computer equipment at the centres. However, the academy provides a personal laptop for apprentices only when they complete the framework. Managers are committed to making the laptop available to learners earlier in the programme, to help them to work independently in their own time.
11. NVQ assessment is well-planned and thorough. Supervisors carry out direct observation in the workplace and make clear arrangements for learners to work on a range of gas appliances. Thorough planning ensures that learners move between geographical regions to cover the range needed for the NVQ. Assessment practice in the academy's centres is similarly thorough. Work on special projects helps learners to generate evidence to demonstrate their competence in key skills. The cross-referencing of workshop tasks to NVQ standards is clear. Verification of the assessment process is also good. Detailed sampling plans ensure all classes and assessors are observed frequently. Many engineers

are qualified NVQ assessors. The academy's guidance states that training officers should not assess their own learners. However, district assessors do not always follow this guidance.

12. Programmes and activities are very well-designed to meet learners' needs and interests. In the first week of training, all learners attend a structured one-week residential induction programme. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's gold award programme is a significant component of the advanced apprenticeship. Learners enjoy participating in the award programme and appreciate the benefits it brings to their training and personal development. They develop a high level of self-confidence and team-working skills. Promotion and reinforcement of health and safety are excellent. There is a carefully planned Monday morning 'safety pause' for learners at each centre, which reinforces health and safety matters and actively encourages learners to identify and deal with risks associated with their work environment. All learners have a good benefits package which includes a good pension scheme, healthcare arrangements and share options. Career progression routes on completion of training are clearly structured. Learners benefit from a mentoring programme when they complete their framework which provides help from more experienced colleagues during their first few months as qualified engineers.
13. Support for learners is excellent. Academy staff fully understand learners' individual needs, providing them with very effective support while they are on the programme and when they leave. When learners finish their apprenticeship their workplace performance is carefully monitored to identify any additional technical training needs and to provide good support. Early in their programme learners are supplied with a good tool kit, a company vehicle, a driving assessment and personal protective equipment. Learners who cannot drive are provided with driving lessons. When learners attend the academy staff ensure that accommodation is of a high standard and meets their needs.
14. There is insufficient early identification of learners' literacy and numeracy needs. Learners complete a verbal and numerical reasoning test as part of the online recruitment process. The results of these tests are used to support the selection process rather than to specifically identify literacy or numeracy support needs. Those few learners who need additional help with literacy or numeracy receive individual support during the training programme. Learners who are capable of studying key skills at a higher level than that required by the framework are not given this opportunity. The recruitment process is effective in ensuring learners have good baseline skills before starting the training programme.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

15. Senior managers provide outstanding leadership to raise achievement and support all learners. The academy's strategic direction is clearly understood by staff at all levels. Managers foster a high performance culture which sets challenging standards for learners and staff. Senior and middle managers are passionate about training and work in close partnership with training officers and support staff to achieve business targets, raise learner success rates and promote a learning-centred environment.

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16. The management and planning of training is particularly good. Detailed programmes show each stage of on- and off-the-job training and the challenging and measurable targets for successful achievement. Staff monitor learners' progress rigorously throughout the training programme and give detailed feedback to help them achieve within the planned timescale. Progress reviews are thorough. Targets are measurable, time-constrained and challenging. The training programme allocates learners to different engineers to ensure that they gain experience on different types of installation. This helps learners to gain experience of servicing, repair and contract and on-demand work. Learners also keep detailed diaries of their work. Supervisors regularly inspect these diaries to monitor progress.
17. Equality of opportunity arrangements are good. The academy undertakes effective promotional and marketing activities to recruit learners from under-represented groups. Staff have participated in extensive publicity campaigns all over the country to promote careers in gas engineering for school pupils. National promotional campaigns make good use of innovative recruitment advertising to target women and minority ethnic groups. Management information on applications for apprenticeships from women and those from minority ethnic groups is carefully analysed to ensure that applicants have fair access to the programmes. The number of successful applicants from these groups contributes to the academy's challenging recruitment targets. Though the proportion of female learners continues to remain low at 2.39%, the representation of minority ethnic groups has increased considerably since the previous inspection to 11%. Arrangements for staff training in equality and diversity are good.
18. Quality improvement arrangements are outstanding. The academy's quality framework covers all aspects of the learning process. The quality improvement plan is an effective working tool which managers use well to monitor improvement actions. Effective use of learner feedback helps to improve the provision. For example, following criticisms of the academy's previous induction programme, managers implemented the week-long residential induction to help learners settle into the programme and to promote effective team-working skills. This initiative has been well-received by learners. The academy's well-established observation of teaching and learning scheme contributes effectively to maintaining good standards of instruction, coaching and teaching. The self-assessment process is rigorous and inclusive. The academy accurately identified all of the key judgements made by inspectors.
19. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are satisfactory. The academy has a rigorous selection and recruitment process and few learners have literacy, numeracy or language support needs. Individual training officers provide support for literacy and numeracy where required, but the support is not formally recorded.
20. The management of resources is satisfactory. Training officers are professionally competent and most have a basic teaching qualification. Assessors and internal verifiers are appropriately qualified. The academy has invested heavily in the new centres and provides good quality resources to support learning.

What learners like:

- 'British Gas provides everything. All they want from me is a commitment to learn'
- 'I'm enjoying it so much I've told all my friends to apply'
- 'I've had just the right mix of practical and classroom training'
- 'It is fantastic'
- 'The accommodation is really good and any problems are sorted out quickly'
- 'Training officers are approachable'
- Good relationships with training officers
- 'Intensive course but really good support available'
- 'First week residential is excellent'

What learners think could improve:

- 'I would like the personal laptop at the start of the programme'
- 'I wish I'd had some help with mathematics before my key skills test'

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes** managed by the provider 2004 year to 2006 year

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	173	94%	51%	92%	26%
		timely	173	94%	37%	92%	17%
	04-05	overall	240	95%	55%	95%	40%
		timely	240	94%	33%	94%	23%
	05-06	overall	594	96%	63%	96%	51%
		timely	596	94%	37%	94%	27%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'