

Network Rail

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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' monitoring 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:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. Network Rail is a company limited by guarantee which was set up by the government in October 2002. Network Rail is responsible for the maintenance, enhancement and renewal of Britain's railway infrastructure, and the day to day operations. In May 2004, Network Rail introduced its advanced apprenticeship scheme. The remit for the scheme is to deliver 1000 skilled maintenance technicians from the first five intakes of apprentices, with the first intake starting in September 2005. In 2006, Network Rail contracted directly with the National Employers Service (NES) of the LSC for the delivery of the advanced apprenticeship framework.
2. There are 428 advanced apprentices, 202 in year one and 226 in year two, in track maintenance, signalling maintenance and electrification and plant. All apprentices are employed and are initially assessed for literacy and numeracy as well as a test for aptitude. First-year off-the-job training is a 42-week full-time residential programme, housed within the Royal Navy's HMS Collingwood and HMS Sultan training and accommodation establishments in Gosport. Years two and three of the programme are assessed within the workplace and supported by frequent scheduled return visits to HMS Sultan.
3. The programme is managed by the national apprentice manager, who is supported by a programme manager for year one and another for years two and three. There are currently six apprenticeship tutors and three administrators.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of the provision and leadership and management are all good. Equality of opportunity and the provider's response to educational and social inclusion are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

5. Network Rail demonstrates a good capacity to improve the provision. Retention rates are outstanding and learners gain a good range of additional qualifications from year one. The 42-week residential programme gives learners good technical foundations and the ability to develop a wide range of personal skills. Staff are experienced and well qualified. Work-based assessors have a good understanding of the programme and there are regular progress reviews between Network Rail and its main programme delivery partner. The relationships between the delivery partners are outstanding. Network Rail is aware of areas for improvement within its quality assurance arrangements and has identified actions to tackle them. All learners are making good progress towards their qualification goals.
6. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. The views of all stakeholders are effectively taken into account. Learners' views about the effectiveness of the programme are collected regularly and used to make improvements. The self-assessment report is clear, well written and sufficiently judgemental, and makes specific reference to each of the five outcomes for children and young people under Every Child Matters. Inspectors agree with many of the strengths and areas for improvement and with most of the grades given in the report. The grade awarded by inspectors for equality of opportunity is higher.

Key strengths

- Outstanding retention rates
- Outstanding resources and facilities for off-the-job training
- Highly effective selection process
- Very good care, guidance and support for learners
- Very high level of support and commitment by Network Rail to the advanced apprenticeship scheme
- Well-designed and managed programme with a clear focus on training and personal development
- Outstanding partnership working
- Outstanding promotion of equality and diversity

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient individualisation of the programme
- Over reliance on teacher-centred delivery
- Underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good as judged in the self-assessment report. Retention is outstanding, with 94% of 2006 starters and 99% of 2007 starters being retained. All learners are progressing well through the programme and are on course for timely

completion; however, insufficient account is taken of learners' prior attainment to ensure they all progress at the most appropriate pace.

8. All learners achieve a good range of qualifications beyond the framework requirements. Most learners in year one achieve a Level 2 Institute of Leadership and Management qualification, which they can continue to follow at Level 3 during their final year. A number of relevant, industry-specific courses are also provided in years two and three that allow learners to acquire workplace skills. These include courses in track inspection, derailment, the signal maintenance testing handbook as well as manual handling and first aid training.
9. The programme has a residential component and is designed to fully accommodate the five Every Child Matters outcomes for young people. For example, all learners are employed and able to join the company pension scheme on day one and can make positive contributions to the local community through voluntary work and the opportunity to undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Learners are in the secure environment of HMS Collingwood naval base and are provided with a healthy, balanced diet to Royal Navy standards. The behaviour and attendance of learners are comprehensively monitored and all are encouraged to become independent and respect the cultural and religious practices of their peers.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. The overall quality of the provision is good as the self-assessment report indicates. Resources and facilities for off-the-job training are outstanding. Classrooms and workshops are well equipped, with new and used industrial equipment in excellent condition in carefully laid out training environments. Much of the industrial equipment is specifically installed for the programme. Learners have access to a very wide variety of training resources, facilities and equipment including navy engineering training facilities.
11. Tutors are highly knowledgeable and industrially experienced and learners speak positively about the good relationships they have with tutors and their peers both on- and off-the-job. However, teaching methods are predominantly tutor-centred and many sessions are uninspiring and include insufficient differentiation to suit the full range of learning abilities. Assessment practice is generally satisfactory. However, there is too little NVQ assessment through observation in the working environment and consequently an overdependence on written evidence. Parent/carers are encouraged to make visits to HMS Collingwood and to be involved in the programme.
12. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is good. Tutors and workplace supervisors are familiar with both elements of the programme and the full training requirements. Workplace supervisors have regular meetings with Network Rail staff at HMS Sultan and assessment of work-based elements of the programme is carried out effectively by supervisors, who maintain clear records of individual learners' progress. However, these records are not common across all depots.
13. The good design of the programme ensures that the needs of learners and employers are well met. Learners benefit from a programme that focuses on technical engineering

competence and also their values and attitudes. Many Network Rail depot managers are positive about the effectiveness of the learners who join them and are keen to provide them with activities that carry significant levels of responsibility. All first-year learners have access to an excellent range of enrichment activities and are given a personal healthy lifestyle assessment which takes a holistic approach to encouraging a healthy and fulfilling work-life balance. The 'house'-based accommodation system encourages participation and involvement in a wide variety of events and activities with a clear focus on personal development. All learners also have the opportunity to further their qualifications through further study at Sheffield Hallam University. However, individualisation of the programme is poor and insufficient account is taken of each learner's previous experience or qualifications. Due to inadequate use of differentiation within the programme, it can fail to stretch or support individuals with different needs or experiences. Poor use is made of individual target-setting, which is neither realistic nor challenging.

14. Network Rail's selection process is highly effective. Prospective learners are effectively guided and supported through assessment centres where clear messages are given to them and their parents/carers. Network Rail's expectations and learners' entitlement are regularly reinforced. A very strong focus is given to the development of the individual and the pastoral and educational support they will receive. Thorough diagnostic and aptitude testing is also carried out. Nevertheless, a minority of learners are not clear about job opportunities open to them or how they might advance their Network Rail careers.
15. The support structure for learners is particularly good and is used effectively by learners. All year-one learners are accommodated in the secure environment of HMS Collingwood. Learners are encouraged to manage themselves and resolve issues under the guidance of Flagship Training's centre manager and support workers. Year two and three learners are encouraged to access a confidential internet-based social networking facility, where they can contact colleagues from other geographical areas, leave points for discussion, and use the site for general communications. The site is accessed by two staff members who reply to various issues and queries. Learners speak positively about the forum and how it can be used for highlighting potential problems before they arise. Tutors take a regular and active interest in their learners, who appreciate and feel more valued because of this.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

16. Leadership and management overall are good. The innovative programme receives very high levels of support and commitment from senior managers. Learners benefit from considerable investment that enables them to be trained and accommodated in a secure environment, utilising outstanding resources and making the most of an excellent range of personal development opportunities. The programme receives good support from Network Rail front line managers, who, by developing a better understanding of the programme, are able to provide learners with relevant activities.
17. The provision receives outstanding support from Flagship Training, the programme delivery partner, and the Royal Navy. The programme has evolved through a highly productive and close relationship with Flagship Training, which trains and supports

Network Rail learners during their 42-week residential programme. For example Flagship Training's academy structure was developed to provide 24-hour support for seven days a week at HMS Collingwood and to encourage learners to use the Royal Navy's vast array of excellent facilities. Staff exchanges are encouraged and frequent use is made by each partner of various specialist equipment and resources; for example, Royal Navy personnel provide an air conditioning component of the programme for learners.

18. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. All relevant staff are CRB checked and Network Rail effectively assumes the parental role during the 42-week residential programme.
19. The arrangements for quality assurance are underdeveloped. Although clear and comprehensive systems are in place to monitor the progress and development of the learners in the workplace, they are not implemented consistently across all depots. For example, records for monitoring learners vary in content and detail and some lack clear targets for future actions.
20. Promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Many learners describe the 42-week residential course as 'life changing'. Learners develop a wide variety of skills that are required for living away from home, including organising and maintaining their shared accommodation, setting shared tasks and planning and organising their leisure activities. They speak positively about the greater insight into other religions and cultures they have gained from living with their peers from different parts of the country and the need to be supportive and flexible to live collectively. Religious and secular festivals are regularly celebrated throughout the year and staff from Flagship Training encourage learners' involvement in leisure activities and in developing independence. Many new friendships are formed during this period and learners develop a useful network of contacts. Recruitment of women and learners from minority ethnic groups to the programme is double the national average for work-based engineering apprenticeships. The company has responded fully and appropriately to the requirements of equalities legislation. A dedicated team is responsible for analysing data, marketing and target-setting. Unsuccessful applications from under-represented groups are checked to ensure compliance with the company's equal opportunities policies and procedures. All learners receive equality and diversity training at induction and have a good appreciation of grievance procedures and anti-bullying policies.

What learners like:

- Good wages
- Meeting new people
- Living independently
- 'You get to move around company while your apprentice'
- 'Going to the depots'
- Knowledge of tutors is good and industrially relevant
- Good resources
- 'I didn't realise when I came to do engineering I'd learn how to do deep sea fishing!'
- 'Not a lot of people I know can say they have friends from all over the UK'
- 'A lot of people did a lot of growing up, individual problems became shared problems'

What learners think could improve:

- The time it takes – 'What is covered in nine months could be done quicker'
- 'Cannot progress at different speeds'
- 'Having to do Saturdays'
- The curfew – 'Should be later on Friday'
- Communication between training centre and depot, including feedback about learners progress
- More C&G electrical courses
- 'Paperwork, too much writing, distracts you from doing the job at the depot'
- Encouragement and assistance to complete NVQ on site – 'Need to see assessor every month'