



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
Northern Ireland Electricity
Networks Limited

Report of an Inspection
in November 2015

Quantitative terms used by the ETI

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning, on Leadership and management, and on the overall quality of professional and technical areas:

Current performance level	Previous performance level ¹
Outstanding	Outstanding
Very good	Very good
Good	Good
Important area(s) for improvement	Satisfactory
Requires significant improvement	Inadequate
Requires urgent improvement	Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

Overall effectiveness outcome	Previous performance level
The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Outstanding and very good
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Good
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection within 12-18 months.	Satisfactory
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection within 12 - 18 months.	Inadequate and unsatisfactory

¹ The ETI performance levels were revised with effect from the 1 September 2015.

Key Performance Indictors and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments at week 4 of year one who completed their occupational training framework, measured over the full duration of their course.
Achievement	The percentage of trainees/apprentices who completed their occupational training framework and who fully achieved their framework qualification.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who progressed to further/higher education/training or employment.

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

A team of four inspectors observed a total of 25 apprentices in ten directed training sessions across the organisation's three training centres and 18 of them were interviewed in focus group meetings. The inspectors held discussions with the technical training manager, the apprentice training co-ordinator, the head of department and co-ordinator of the college provision and ten tutors. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the apprentices' work, tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans and personal training plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

The inspectors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people. The inspection included the opportunity for the apprentices to express their views on their training and learning experience by completing an online questionnaire prior to the inspection.

The questionnaire returns show that almost all of the apprentices' feel safe and secure, and well-supported in all aspects of their training. Almost all of the apprentices who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about their training experiences, and report that they feel well-prepared for the next steps in their training and employment.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Learners	33	14	42%	2

2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the achievements and standards;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of provision for learning and training; and
- the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation and which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning* <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards-iqrs-work-based-learning.htm>

3. Context

Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited (NIE Networks) is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Electricity Supply Board based in the Republic of Ireland. NIE Networks owns and operates the electricity transmission and distribution network in Northern Ireland. The apprenticeship training is managed by the Technical Training Manager, supported by the Apprentice Training Co-ordinator, who reports to the Human Resources Director, a member of the NIE Networks executive.

The organisation is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) to provide ApprenticeshipsNI programmes at level 2 and 3 in electrical power engineering. Currently, it delivers three pathways; overhead lines, substation plant and underground cables.

NIE Networks delivers all of the practical training for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme from its three training centres in Ballymena, Craigavon and Londonderry. Since 2008, the Northern Regional College (College) has been sub-contracted to deliver the electrical power engineering technical certificate of the apprenticeship framework, and for the essential skill of information communication technology (ICT).

During the inspection, there were 33 apprentices registered on the level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programme; 25 employed by NIE Networks and eight year 1 apprentices employed by a supply chain company. All of the year 1 apprentices (24%) were employed in the overhead lines pathway, the year 2 apprentices (24%) in jointing, the year 3 apprentices (20%) in station maintenance and the apprentices who are almost complete (32%) were in overhead lines.

The academic profile of the apprentices is strong, according to the data supplied by the organisation, all of the apprentices commenced their training with four or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, or equivalent. This is in line with the minimum entry requirements set by the employers and therefore none of the apprentices required essential skills training in literacy or numeracy. Over the last four years, of the 32 apprentices (46%) who were required to undertake training in the essential skill of ICT, 27 (84%) had completed the training and achieved the qualification at the level required by their framework at the time of the inspection; 5 (16%) were in training.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Outstanding
Provision for learning	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding

Going well

- The outstanding leadership and management of the apprenticeship programme, including the senior management team's high level of commitment to the achievement of excellence in apprenticeship training.
- The highly effective links and partnerships with key stakeholders including the recent introduction of apprenticeship training for a supply chain company to further improve occupational standards across the wider electrical engineering industry.
- The continued high levels of investment in accommodation, specialist facilities and equipment to ensure a high standard of training is maintained.

- The systematic and rigorous training approaches used to develop and embed the apprentices' understanding and implementation of sector leading health and safety practice and systems of work.
- The very good and often outstanding standards of work achieved by the apprentices, who are making excellent progress in the acquisition of their professional and technical skills and wider transferable skills.
- The highly-experienced and supportive tutors and work-based supervisors who contribute effectively to the training and development of the apprentices.
- The very good to outstanding quality of the majority (60%) of the learning, teaching and training sessions observed.
- The outstanding quality of the pastoral care and learning support provided for the apprentices, characterised by high expectations and a supportive ethos.
- The outstanding quality of the careers, education, information, advice and guidance provided for the apprentices, who have a clear understanding of possible progression pathways to higher education and who are very well informed about the career progression routes within their respective companies.
- The very good retention (86%) and outstanding achievement (97%) and progression rates (100%).

5. Achievements and standards

Achievements and standards are outstanding.

The organisation has very high expectations for the apprentices and as a result nearly all of them demonstrate excellent attitudes towards their training and work. The apprentices all have a very high awareness of health and safety and carry out risk assessments for each job and provide visitors with a good health and safety site induction. The apprentices are able to carry out their assigned tasks to a very high standard with appropriate levels of supervision.

The standards of nearly all of the apprentices' written work and numeracy skills range from very good to excellent and their verbal communication skills are also of a very high standard. In addition, the apprentices develop very well their interpersonal skills and are able to work effectively in teams.

The apprentices are highly motivated and enthusiastic learners, they set high standards for themselves and aspire to achieve to their full potential. The tutors have established a very good rapport and positive, supportive working relationships with the apprentices; attendance in the directed training sessions observed was outstanding.

The apprentices are making very good progress in their training and a high number achieve beyond the minimum standard. They work to very high occupational standards following well the companies' standard operating procedures; for example carrying out maintenance checks on an electricity substation, systematically checking for any signs of deterioration. They undertake the work thoroughly and are able to articulate clearly why the checks are being carried out and what indicators would signify underlying problems. The supervisors all report that the apprentices are highly motivated, are keen learners, and integrate and work effectively in the teams.

All of the apprentices have excellent opportunities to progress beyond the apprenticeship framework through a wide range of enhancements, such as, conflict management and report writing training. There are excellent opportunities for the NIE Networks apprentices to access higher level qualifications to develop further their knowledge and for them to progress their career within the company.

Over the last four years, the retention rate on the level 2 and 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programme is very good (86%), the achievement rate is outstanding (97%), and all of the apprentices sustained employment on the successful completion of their apprenticeship.

6. Provision for learning

The provision for learning is outstanding.

Overall planning of the different elements of the apprentices' programme is excellent. All aspects of the learning are planned and timed effectively to enable the apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills holistically and systematically. Very rigorous monitoring is in place at all key stages of the apprentices training to ensure they all progress and achieve to their full potential.

The quality of the learning, teaching and training is good or better; the majority (60%) of the directed sessions observed were very good or outstanding. Most of the training sessions are planned effectively and apprentices are progressing at an appropriate pace, in line with their prior achievements. Almost all of the apprentices engage purposefully in discussions, readily asking appropriate questions to extend their knowledge and understanding. Particularly strong features of the directed training provision are the skillful way in which the tutors: help the apprentices to understand complex technical procedures; articulate clearly the linkages between the underpinning knowledge and the practical activities; and use questioning strategies highly effectively to embed and deepen understanding.

All of the apprentices requiring ICT essential skills training, were working at level 2 and making good progress. This provision is appropriately provided early in the first year in a fast-track model that matches well the apprentices learning needs. The quality of the ICT training is good with the apprentices being well engaged in their learning, however, greater use could be made of the professional and technical context. The questioning strategies employed need to be developed to encourage the apprentices to appreciate more fully the functionality of the ICT applications.

Assessments in the College are planned well; they are distributed evenly across the year and both the planning and the outcomes are shared with the apprentices and NIE Networks. Regular and constructive feedback is given to the apprentices by their designated workplace assessor and key triggers are used effectively to initiate appropriate support; the apprentices achieve well to appropriately high industry standards. A skills gap analysis is used effectively to identify any deficits in the apprentices training and to plan for additional support. An electronic portfolio supports well the recording, monitoring and assessment of a wide range of evidence submitted by the apprentices.

The quality of the apprentices' learning experiences is outstanding; they have excellent opportunities to develop their practical skills. They are able to practise and develop their occupational skills on replicas of the electricity network, substations and transmission towers within a safe environment. These skills are then consolidated effectively through their deployment on site under appropriate supervision.

Almost all of the apprentices have additional opportunities to enrich further their learning experiences through participation in outreach programmes and through involvement in charity events.

A thorough induction programme informs the apprentices fully of all aspects of their training programme, and equips them with key foundational work-related skills. These include health and wellbeing, team building, personal safety information and training, basic practical skills, and corporate protocols and responsibilities.

Over the apprentices' training period, rigorous, detailed and regular monitoring and reviewing of their progress informs accurately planning for future training and any additional learning support. An extensive skills matrix, together with detailed evaluations of each apprentice's strengths and development needs, meticulously tracks their achievements and standards of work. Sensitive, timely and appropriately robust additional support programmes enables each apprentice to overcome effectively any barriers to good progress in their learning. This includes, for example, mentoring, additional mathematical lessons, assessment catch-up days and performance reviews. Quarterly team briefing days for the apprentices also provides them with ongoing, well-targeted pastoral enrichment activities, such as dealing with stress, drugs and alcohol abuse, and safer driving. The well-established links to key external agencies appropriately enhances the personal and social development and support arrangements for the apprentices, including access to a professional counselling service.

The quality of the careers provision is outstanding. The apprentices are provided with high quality advice and guidance which supports them very effectively in their career planning. All of the apprentices interviewed had a clear understanding of possible progression pathways to higher education and to higher roles within their company. The apprentices are actively encouraged and supported to progress to level 4 or 5 educational programmes in the third year of their apprenticeships. These well-considered progression pathways are matched well to the business needs of the company and prepare effectively the apprentices for future promotion. Current quality improvement planning of the careers provision, particularly the review and refresh of documentation, is timely and aligned well to the needs of the apprentices employed outside of NIE Networks.

7. Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the apprenticeship programme is outstanding; NIE Networks demonstrates a high level of commitment to the provision of excellent training. It support and invests significantly in the provision to ensure the delivery of high quality training that produces highly skilled, well-rounded, and motivated employees that contribute effectively to society and to the economy.

The senior management team have a clear vision for the development of the apprenticeship training in the area of electrical power engineering. They participate in sectoral committees, forums and groups that are leading the review of apprenticeship training and in the development of new qualifications for the industry.

There is excellent and regular communication within NIE Networks between the technical training team, the product training co-ordinators, and the business managers to develop the curriculum and plan the work schedules for the apprentices. Consequently, the training programmes are coherent and cohesive, well-planned and fully integrated into the business areas ensuring that the apprentices acquire up-to-date and relevant professional and technical skills and knowledge.

There is excellent communication between NIE Networks and the College to ensure the training in the workplace and in directed training is fully connected. NIE Networks is involved fully in selection of technical certificate units to ensure an appropriate curriculum is delivered that is well-matched to the needs of the company and the apprentices. NIE Networks communication with the supply chain company is effective in ensuring the delivery of a high quality training provision for their apprentices that meets the company's business needs.

There are effective self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in place. For example, there are ongoing rigorous processes in place to review the effectiveness of the provision; to identify areas for improvement, and to implement effective action for improvement. The organisation values highly the feedback it obtains from the apprentices and uses this to inform changes to the training programme that benefit both the apprentices and the company. NIE networks should, however more fully involve the College in the self-evaluation process to better inform actions to promote improvement in the quality of the overall provision.

The organisation demonstrates a strong commitment to the training of its staff. All of the staff are very well-qualified and experienced and are provided with ongoing, relevant continuing professional development opportunities. Most of the training engineers have completed or are in the process of completing the Certificate in Teaching qualification. The training engineers and instructors maintain their occupational skills through, for example, their deployment on stand-by and on emergency crews during escalations plans.

The NIE Network's specialist training facilities are outstanding. The organisation has invested significantly in upgrading the facilities, including, in 2014, the enhancement of the facilities in Londonderry to enable live service jointing training and the installation of new transmission towers to enable the apprentices to practice in a safe environment.

The organisation maintains extensive links with schools across Northern Ireland. It provides work-placement opportunities for young people who are interested in a career in the company. The organisation sources a range of technical training programmes for apprentices from the further education colleges and provides a fully funded bursary for eligible apprentices upon completion of their programme to progress to an Electrical Engineering Degree at Queens University Belfast.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the organisation has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

8. Overall effectiveness

Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any area for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.

APPENDIX

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 3	33	100%

Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Overhead lines	22	67%
Cable jointing	6	18%
Station maintenance	5	15%

Qualifications of current trainees/apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	Apprenticeships NI (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	100%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	100%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	100%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	100%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	100%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	0%

Note: All data was sourced from NIE Networks Limited at the time of the inspection.

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