



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Northern Ireland Electricity Training

Inspected: April 2008

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number

All statistics used in this report have been provided and verified by Northern Ireland Electricity Training.

Grading system

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) is piloting a new 6-point grading scale to replace the original 4-point scale as set out below. Where grades are recorded in this report, the grade is given on both the old and the revised scales.

ORIGINAL GRADE	REVISED GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence.
1	2	Consistently good; major strengths
2	3	Important strengths in most of provision. Areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address.
2	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed.
3	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action.
4	6	Major shortcomings which require urgent action

PART ONE

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) owns and operates the electricity transmission and distribution network which supplies approximately 800,000 customers in Northern Ireland. The training department of NIE is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to provide apprenticeship training through the Jobskills and Training for Success programmes. All of the apprentices on the NIE training programmes have been recruited to meet the company's own business needs.

1.2 The NIE training department is located in the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) complex at Nutts Corner, Dundrod. Apprentice training is a section within the training department led by the apprentice and training co-ordinator, under the overall leadership of the training manager. Seven full-time training instructors deliver specialist in-house directed training and co-ordinate work-based learning and assessment.

1.3 At the time of the inspection, a total of 38 apprentices were registered on the training programmes; 25 on Jobskills and 13 on Training for Success. The apprentices target a level 3 apprenticeship, which includes a level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), an appropriate level 3 technical certificate and, if required, level 2 essential skills qualifications in application of number and communication, and a level 2 key skill qualification in Information Communication Technology (ICT). Apprentices are recruited from across Northern Ireland with the current cohort of apprentices residing in Belfast, East Tyrone, Mid Down, North Antrim, North Armagh, North West, South Antrim, South Down, South Londonderry and South West.

1.4 Almost all (97%) of the apprentices hold at least four General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications at grade C or above, including English and Mathematics. In addition, half of the apprentices hold at least one of a range of level 3 or higher qualifications including; General Certificate of Education (GCE), National Certificate (NC), National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND). Almost all of the apprentices are male and aged between 18 and 24 years.

2. PROVISION

2.1 Apprentices are trained in one of three specialist areas; underground cable jointer, overhead linesperson or plant maintenance electrician (PME). The number trained in each discipline is determined by NIE's annual business requirements and the number of suitable applicants. Practical skills training is delivered in weekly blocks at Nutts Corner or at the company's Silverwood training facility in Lurgan. Workplace training is site-based within one or more of the NIE geographical regions.

2.2 At the time of the inspection, first year apprentices were working towards an NVQ level 2 in electricity distribution and transmission engineering. The remainder of the apprentices were completing a level 3 NVQ in electricity distribution and transmission

engineering. Apprentices attend college on a day-release basis each week to study a NC in electrical/electronic engineering. Second year apprentices are currently completing their technical certificate at the Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC), all other technical certificate provision is at the Ballymena campus of the Northern Regional College (NRC).

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The inspection focused on the quality of the apprenticeship programme including the preparation for life and work provision, which incorporates essential skills, apprentice support, and careers education information advice and guidance (CEIAG).

3.2 A team of three inspectors observed 21 apprentices in directed training across Nutts Corner training centre, NRC and BMC. Eighteen apprentices were observed in workplace training across the company's various geographical regions.

3.3 Extended discussions were held with the training manager, apprentice and training co-ordinator, human resources advisor, product training co-ordinators, training instructors, team managers, craftsmen, apprentices, college co-ordinators and lecturers. The inspectors scrutinised the NIE training self evaluation document, development plan, relevant policies and procedures, monitoring and tracking documentation, student written work, personal files, training plans, internal and external verifier reports and other relevant documentation.

3.4 In preparation for the inspection a sample of the apprentices completed a questionnaire, which provided them with an opportunity to comment on the quality of their training and learning experiences, including pastoral care.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the area inspected, Northern Ireland Electricity has major strengths in its educational and training provision. The educational, training and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met, along with the needs of the community and the economy. The community can have confidence in the organisation's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- commitment of the leadership and management to provide excellent training and support;
- quality of the self evaluation and development processes in place to support continuous improvement;
- rates of retention (87%), progression (100%) and success (100%);
- high standards of occupational competence, technical knowledge, communication, numeracy and ICT skills demonstrated by almost all of the apprentices;

- range and quality of the work-based training provided for all of the apprentices; and
- quality of the directed training and learner support.

4.3 The main area for improvement is the:

- essential skills provision for apprentices whose existing entry level 2 qualifications in literacy and/or numeracy have expired.

GRADES

Provision	Overall		
	No of apprentices	Grade (using the old four point system)	Grade (using the revised six-point system)
Overall	38	1	2
Contributory Grades:			
Leadership & Management		1	2
Achievements & standards		1	1
Learning and Training		1	2

Professional & Technical Area	No of apprentices	Grade	
Electricity transmission and distribution Engineering	38	1	1
Preparation for Life & Work	All	1	2
<i>Contributory grades:</i>			
- Literacy – Essential Skills	All	1	2
- Numeracy – Essential Skills	All	1	2
- ICT – Key Skills	All	1	2
- Trainee Support	All	1	1
- Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)	All	1	2

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of leadership and management is consistently good at all levels. Northern Ireland Electricity has an effective management structure in place and is fully committed to apprentice training, which is an integral part of its overall business plan.

5.2 The apprentice and training co-ordinator holds regular team meetings, to review and monitor the progress of apprentices in their training. The training manager chairs training committee meetings on a monthly basis, to discuss and plan for a range of operational issues relating to all aspects of training. Appropriate action is taken to resolve issues that arise around learner progress and achievement.

5.3 Excellent working relationships and effective channels of communication exist between all staff. Training instructors are appropriately qualified and have extensive experience of NIE systems and procedures. Training department staff are highly motivated and have established good links with a range of external organisations that contribute significantly to the training provision including; the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Clarity Consultants, Blackwell Associates, Learning Skills and Development Agency (LSDA) and the Further Education colleges. The company is also represented on the qualifications and standards panel of the Energy and Utility Skills (EU Skills) Sector Skills Council (SSC) to ensure that local industry training needs are represented.

5.4 The self evaluation and development planning process is both rigorous and effective, and results in areas for improvement being identified quickly and addressed successfully.

5.5 Effective care and support arrangements for all participants are in place. There is a need, however, for greater clarity in the company's policies and procedures to ensure that apprentices' travel is not excessive during the training period.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Almost all of the apprentices observed during the inspection were making excellent progress in both directed training and workplace training.

6.2 Almost all of the apprentices demonstrated very high standards of occupational competence and have very high expectations in all aspects of their training. They develop highly specialised skills to enable them to work effectively in the electricity supply industry including; cable jointing, electrical plant maintenance, overhead line installation, electrical testing, tree cutting, and working on live systems. Almost all of the apprentices observed during the inspection worked effectively with their colleagues as part of a team. All apprentices demonstrate very high standards of health and safety practice, which is essential to protect themselves and others when working in the potentially hazardous electricity supply industry.

6.3 Achievements in the key skill of ICT are excellent for the three years of statistics available.

6.4 Standards of oral and written communication for almost all of the apprentices are good to excellent. They are able to follow complex oral and written instructions including; permit-to-work systems, circuit diagrams, maintenance information and safety instructions. Apprentices can also speak confidently, clearly and accurately about various aspects of their work using appropriate technical language. One of the mandatory units of the technical certificate, 'communications for technicians', requires apprentices to further develop their ability to communicate using a diverse range of methods including the use of ICT to present information in engineering settings.

6.5 The standards of mathematical competence demonstrated by almost all apprentices in their work for the technical certificate and in the workplace are good. The mandatory level 3 technical certificate unit 'mathematics for technicians' progresses the apprentices beyond GCSE level by building on prior knowledge and applying it to a more practical electrical engineering context.

6.6 Apprentices have access to excellent progression routes including; higher education, specialist skills development and career progression within NIE. A minority of third year apprentices were attending the NRC to complete a higher national certificate (HNC) in electrical/electronic engineering.

6.7 Over the period 2003 to 2007, of the 46 apprentices who started the apprentice programme, 15 have gained the full award and have progressed to employment with NIE. Taking into consideration the 25 still on the programme at the time of the inspection, these figures represent a good retention rate of 87%, and excellent success and progression rates of 100%, for the apprentices who successfully completed the programme.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 The quality of the directed training observed at the Nutts Corner training centre is excellent and well-matched to the workplace training. The quality of the directed training observed in the colleges ranges from good to excellent. Northern Ireland Electricity have liaised with the NRC to match the content of the Technical Certificate to the requirements of their industry and to provide a good progression route to higher education. There is a need, however, to revise the delivery of the Technical Certificate to accommodate apprentices travelling long distances to attend college, through revised attendance patterns and/or on the more effective use of the college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

7.2 The provision of a fast track apprentice cable jointer programme is excellent. At the time of the inspection, there were five apprentices on the fast track programme which recognises prior achievement and experience and allows eligible apprentices to complete training in a shorter period of time. Further good practice includes the introduction of a multidisciplinary training programme that combines overhead line training with tree cutting, and provides apprentices with a range of additional accredited qualifications. At the time of the inspection, three apprentices were on the multidisciplinary training programme.

7.3 The NIE induction programme is comprehensive and includes the detailed assessment of the skills of each apprentice to determine the area of specialism in which they will train. Other excellent features of the induction programme include; a session on road safety delivered by the PSNI, accredited basic first aid training delivered by Blackwell Associates, and accredited Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) manual handling training. However, the procedures to identify apprentices requiring additional support with literacy, numeracy or ICT are underdeveloped.

7.4 All apprentices on the Jobskills programme have obtained a concession for prior achievement at GCSE level for the key skills of communication and application of number. There is a need, however, to put in place suitable arrangements to allow the significant number of apprentices on the Training for Success programme holding GCSE qualifications in English and Mathematics which are more than five years old, to obtain accreditation for the appropriate essential skills. In addition, the ICT key skill training and assessment should be delivered earlier in the programme to better prepare apprentices for the demands of their technical certificate.

7.5 The NIE training centres at Silverwood and Nutts Corner are resourced well with specialist tools and equipment to ensure that training is of a high a quality and well matched to industry working practices.

7.6 The high quality pastoral care and support provision includes good links with external organisations which provide additional support when required. A small number of apprentices, for example, have been referred to Clarity Consulting where they received excellent support. An excellent Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is in place which is initiated when performance issues are identified through team manager and soft skills reports. The PIP highlights actions required of the apprentice, time frames for improvement and the process includes weekly reviews. The procedures work well to help apprentices improve their performance and to retain their place on the programme.

7.7 Effective policies and procedures are in place to meet the requirements of the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. There is comprehensive and constructive guidance on procedures to be followed by all staff members in the event of an incident.

7.8 Good quality CEIAG is provided during induction by a careers advisor from the Department. Instructors and workplace supervisors provide timely and informal advice during the training programme to guide the apprentices in their career progression, however, there is a need to formalise this process to ensure that all apprentices receive the highest quality CEIAG.

PART THREE

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Northern Ireland Electricity Training needs to revise its annual development plan to take account of the following key priority:

- the provision of essential skills training for apprentices, whose existing entry level 2 qualifications in literacy and/or numeracy have expired.

TABLES

JOBSKILLS MODERN APPRENTICESHIP

Statistics provided and verified by Northern Ireland Electricity Training

Year	Started (completed 4 weeks)	Retention rate %	Success rate %	Progressed to relevant employment %
2003/2004	17	88	100	100
2005/2006	18	78	-	-
2006/2007	11	100	-	-
	46	87	100	100

NOTE: 2007/2008 - still on training.

2004/2005 - No apprentices recruited during this period.

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