

Trainings

Given the power to keep

by **Angela McCarthy**

Electrical supply apprentice says he soon learned to be cautious

Stable and continuous power supply is an essential for all Kiwis, so the role of electricity supply electricians is vital in ensuring power through installation and maintenance of electrical services to power stations, substations and distribution networks.

Electricity supply electricians learn their trade through ESITTO national certificate qualifications in electrical supply, qualifying with a level-four qualification that includes the registration needs for domestic and commercial electricians.

Trainees learn about electrical theory, knowledge of trade practice and application of relevant legislation, codes of practice and standards. Practical training includes installation of cables, equipment and fittings in different environments, maintenance and repair of electrical equip-

ment and testing of installations.

Evidence of on-job learning is collected through work orders, log books, site diaries, tailgate forms and feedback from supervisors.

Off-job training occurs through block courses and part-time night classes. There is also a distance learning option with the Open Polytechnic.

ESITTO currently has 207 trainees doing the level four national certificate, with 168 doing the electricity supply electrician strand.

The apprentice

Jonathan Adams, 24

Electrical supply apprentice for Mighty River Power
Just completed apprenticeship

I do maintenance work on power stations, covering everything from installing power points to rewiring the 40-50 megawatt generators.

I am presently working in Taupo at Nga Awa Purua geothermal power station which has 147 megawatt capacity. Before that I was at Southdown

in Penrose which has 176 megawatts. An average house consumes 100 kilowatts.

Electricity is dangerous because you can't see, hear or feel it – until you get a shock. Old electricians say you're not a "real" sparkie until you've experienced a shock. I've had one shock and blown up one tool. It certainly teaches you to be very cautious and specific.

When I left school I got accepted into a mechatronics degree, but decided to apply for the Mighty River Power apprenticeship scheme. I'm a practical person and I wanted on-the-job experience and liked how the scheme covers four qualifications; electrical supply, electrical registration, occupational health and safety and mechanical engineering.

I made the short-list, but missed out. Luckily I got in on my second application.

Every year we did two block courses at Wintec in Hamilton. The first one was right at the start of the apprenticeships and we all had to live together for 10 weeks. We kept a diary of our work on site so the bosses



Jonathan Adams likes that the scheme covers four qualifications.
Picture / Ted Baghurst

could see what we were learning and what we still needed to cover. We were supervised constantly.

As part of the apprenticeship I also worked with domestic and commer-

country running

Electrician

National Certificate in Electricity Supply (Electrical); Electrical Supply Electrician strand (Level 4)

Electrical Supply Industry Training Organisation (ESITTO)
Contact: 0800 437 486 (0800 ESITTO), info@esito.org.nz, www.esito.org.nz

Entry requirements: NOEA level 2 (or equivalent) English, science, maths. Electronics, technology and physics also helpful.

Training costs (including tools, personal protective equipment): Typically covered by employer.

Pays: Varies by company.

Apprentices typically start on minimum rate. Newly qualified, \$35,000 — \$45,000.

cial electricians, including just Switchboards in Albany where I learned to build switchboards. This is done to widen our skills and gave us good contacts for later work because

Mighty River Power usually only employs the top 5 per cent from each intake. I've kept in that bracket so I've got my fingers crossed.

The employer

Lou Ewington
Apprentice programme manager for Mighty River Power

We currently have apprentices doing maintenance work on Mighty River Power's hydro, geothermal and gas-fired plants and we had them helping with the construction phase of Nga Awa Purua geothermal power station near Taupo.

We're taking 12 electrical or mechanical apprentices each year into our three-year programme.

Our programme involves about 40 per cent off-job academic study through Wintec and 60 per cent on-job training. The block courses are designed so apprentices learn the basic skills and then have an opportunity to apply those skills through project work. The on-job component often requires 50 or more hours a

week — so we try to keep academic study separate through block courses so they're not too loaded up.

Apprentices use a log book, which is signed off by an industry-registered supervisor. For the first time this year their records will be electronic.

We want people with a passion and understanding of the electricity supply industry. The course is demanding so apprentices need to be disciplined, have a good work ethic, be 100 per cent reliable, and also need ability in maths and physics and have good communication skills.

Entry into the programme is competitive — last year I received 129 applications for 12 places.

Jonathan narrowly missed out first time so he is a great example of why it is worth persevering. We could see he had the skills but we wanted to know if he had the rigour and discipline.

By applying again after working hard at another job, Jonathan showed real passion for the programme and the industry.

He has continued to prove himself, most recently as ESITTO 2010 overall trainee of the year.