

Company Profile

Western Power Distribution (WPD) owns and operates the electricity distribution networks in South Wales and South West England. WPD does not get involved in either the buying or selling of electricity to consumers which is the responsibility of electricity supply companies.

WPD is owned by PPL Global LLC, a subsidiary of PPL Corporation of Allentown, Pennsylvania. In October 2000, WPD acquired Hyder plc, the former Welsh multi-utility company which owned the electricity distribution business serving South and West Wales.

WPD delivers electricity to 1.4 million customers over a 14,400 km² service area in South West England, and to just over 1million customers over a 11,800 km² service area in South and West Wales. Our network is one of the of the largest of all the distribution networks in the UK, covering densely populated residential neighbourhoods and widely dispersed rural populations.

The company employs approximately 2,500 staff of whom 1,500 are based in South West England and around 1,000 are located in Wales.

We have around 90,000 customers registered with us for Priority Services.

WPD's excellent customer service has been recognised through the government's Charter Mark scheme. WPD is proud to be the only energy company to be awarded a Charter Mark five times.

Our Approach to Priority Services

Our approach is always to ensure that we take an holistic view of customer needs and provide the best service we can to all customers – regardless of their disability or special need.

However this year we have considered our communication strategy and our accessibility to customers and have undertaken a range of relatively small but effective measures to try and ensure that we are communicating with customers in the way that they want – and also provide them with a greater range of choice.

We used the DSP Panel feedback as an opportunity to review our services and adopt or extend best practice in providing priority services and communicating with customers. We used feedback from our customers and energywatch to develop new initiatives that focus on improving the overall level of customer service delivered by our frontline staff. We believe that the changes we have introduced strengthen our ability to provide a flexible service that meets the needs of individual customers

Wider Communication Strategies

We have improved the way in which our customers can reach us via our Contact Centre, our website and site visits.

Empathy Workshops “Communication Detectives”

Our Contact Centre is the main way in which our customers communicate with us. We answer around 1700 calls on an average day and up to 24,000 calls during a widespread supply emergency.

We have developed an innovative approach to training Contact Centre staff to communicate with hard to reach customers. Since 2002 WPD has worked in partnership with Hijinx, a local inclusive theatre group, to develop workshops focussing on communication skills and disability awareness. Hijinx is an award winning professional theatre company, founded in 1981. It specialises in bringing theatre to the learning disability community in Wales through the inclusion of people with learning disabilities in its Odyssey Theatre Group and its Outreach work (see website www.hijinx.org.uk). A particular aim of the outreach work is to raise awareness of different disabilities, break down barriers and to raise awareness of communication difficulties.

Previous joint initiatives included disability awareness workshops for new WPD staff in 2003, and a work placement for a member of Odyssey with learning disabilities during Disability Awareness Week 2004.

In 2006 we developed a tailored training programme with Hijinx that involved small groups of staff from the contact centre. Each session also included two young people with either a physical and /or learning disability. The aim of this was to give our staff a realistic and powerful insight into what it is like for people to communicate with a company by telephone in quite a distressing situation. Ultimately we believe that the opportunity to hear first hand these types of experiences will result in our frontline staff being more aware, empathetic and confident to deal with customers with communication difficulties.

Altogether 50 staff took part in the workshops held in February 2007 with feedback from staff very encouraging. Among the comments in a follow up questionnaire were:

‘It opened my eyes to a lot of issues I was not fully aware of. It also made me think about the way I do my job and how it can be for the people on the other end of the ‘phone’

“I was not looking forward to the workshop thinking ‘what’s this all about’ but I enjoyed it very much. The boys (from Odyssey) were great. They had achieved so much and it made me think more about how we react to people on the ‘phone’

“Having a brother with a learning disability I felt the session broke a lot of social barriers. I would recommend the empathy training experience to anyone who deals with front-line customer service”.

The workshops also highlighted how young people with communication disabilities can make a positive contribution to improving the service of not just WPD – but all companies. Not only does this improve the awareness of communication

disabilities, but it presents a very positive image of people with a learning disability and the contribution that they can make.

The lessons learned of 'keep it simple', 'ask one question at a time' and 'be patient' are ultimately principles that will benefit all of WPD's customers. Improvements in the way we handle calls and the quality of the information that we can pass to our field staff dealing with the incident reported by the customer, can directly result in electricity supplies being restored more quickly.

Since completing our Empathy Training Workshops we have been approached by other private sector organisations that have heard about our innovative training programme and would be interested in adopting it for their staff.

Improved Website Accessibility

Our website is another increasingly key method of communicating with our customers and the wider community. We receive around 18,000 visits per month on our website.

Working with our web designers we have upgraded our website (www.westernpower.co.uk) to conform with the Website Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines published by the World Wide Web Consortium (WC3), and meet their test for the highest level of accessibility.

Among some of the accessibility features of our website are: hot keys, choice of colours/fonts/sizes and printer friendly pages. In addition WPD has installed the mechanism for the 'Browsealoud" facility. This programme enables users to have a spoken word version of the text they are viewing and is particularly helpful to those people who have limited reading and writing abilities. In addition WPD is making this facility available in both English and Welsh and will be one of the first companies in the UK to do so. This will be of significant value to Welsh learners who can use the facility in conjunction with our completely Welsh website.

To ensure that we are meeting the needs of our customers and to encourage feedback we have also introduced a permanent feedback questionnaire on the website so that users can not only comment on website accessibility but also provide important feedback on navigation, content and relevance.

Interpreter Service for Deaf Customers during site visits

Following a site visit to with a deaf customer to discuss the resiting of a pole on her property we have introduced and communicated the availability of a deaf interpreter service for staff. On this occasion a team manager contacted a local BSL interpreter to meet the customer on site (together with him) and the customer was pleased with the result.

We have now provided staff with the information they need to contact BSL interpreters directly to provide this service to any deaf customer who asks us to visit them at home. We have updated our website and Intranet information to include these details – in addition to the previous information about the RNID Typetalk service. All our planned interruption letters include the typetalk equivalent telephone number.

The customer also followed up the meeting by email. As a result we have also reminded staff to provide their email and mobile phone details so that hearing impaired customers are able to use electronic communication as an alternative to contacting individual staff by telephone.

HIJINX



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5th March 2007

Dear Tracy,

I am writing to outline the fantastic development of the ongoing partnership between Western Power Distribution and Hijinx Theatre.

The relationship began in 2002 with the sponsorship of our inclusive community group – Odyssey Theatre which includes adults with learning disabilities. In 2003 Hijinx ran disability awareness lunchtime sessions for staff at Lamby Way. One of the three facilitators was Martin Vick, a man with Down's syndrome and a member of Odyssey Theatre. In 2004 Martin returned to Western Power to sit on the reception desk at Lamby Way during Learning Disability Week.

This relationship has been further strengthened by the recent series of 9 empathy workshops entitled 'Communication Detectives' delivered to all of the 50 call centre staff. Each session looked at two inter linked areas from our work; communication skills and disability awareness. The main aim was to begin to understand how we communicate by exploring both verbal and non- verbal approaches to communication. The workshops then explored the area of disability and how both physical and learning disability may hinder effective communication on the telephone and sought strategies to overcome them.

Being able to deliver the same workshop, with some minor changes, to a different group of people, nine times, has created a wonderful hands-on training opportunity for Hijinx to employ people with learning disabilities as facilitators. The training sessions were co-led by Artistic Director, Gaynor Lougher and Outreach Officer, Nick Llewellyn and were assisted by two facilitators with a learning disability per workshop. In all, four workshop assistants from Odyssey Theatre and Outreach projects have been involved in the workshops; Simon Richards, Martin Vick, Gareth Clark and Stuart Campbell. It has been a huge learning curve for them and they have all risen to the challenge and grown in confidence by doing so.

Understandably, many of the call centre staff were apprehensive about coming to the workshop as they had no idea of what to expect, but on the whole they were willing to engage and participate in what proved to be a positive and thought provoking session.

This has been a huge learning curve for Western Power staff as throughout the workshop they were challenged to integrate and work with our assistant facilitators, who also spoke about their particular disabilities, and they did so with great sensitivity and enjoyment. This approach created an awareness of real life disability which most training approaches would not be able to so successfully facilitate.

Hijinx Theatre have thoroughly enjoyed this experience and Western Power have enabled us to use our skills in a positive way whilst promoting the awareness of people with a learning disability. We hope this relationship will grow and strengthen in the years to come.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Lougher
Artistic Director

Nick Llewellyn
Outreach Officer

Hijinx Theatre Ltd. is registered in England & Wales No. 2161783 Registered Charity No. 1078358
Supported by the Arts Council of Wales and Cardiff County Council A member of the Independent Theatre Council

Priority Customer Care Initiatives

Working with Air Products to raise awareness of the Priority Services Register and co-ordinate emergency care

A key customer group that we targeted was medically electricity dependent customers. Firstly we want to increase the numbers of these customers on our register and secondly we want to improve the service provided to them during unplanned interruptions which is a critical time for them.

Raising awareness

In 2006, the Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly re-contracted the provision of home oxygen equipment. As a result we found that fewer oxygen dependent customers were being notified to us. We therefore decided to target this group of priority need customers.

Working in partnership with energywatch's Priority Services Adviser for Wales, we established new links with Air Products, the private sector provider for Wales. This included a visit by Air Products Sales Manager and Clinical Nurse Adviser & energywatch's Priority Services Adviser to see our Control Centre in action. During the visit, the Air Products representative was able to see our response to a power cut which affected an oxygen dependent customer.

We are setting up a system for ensuring that new electricity dependent Air Products customers are registered with us.

The partnership with Air Products also enables us to benefit from their customer service promotional work. They have agreed to promote WPD's PSR in their forthcoming Customer Survey. Air Products has also helped us to establish links with the British Lung Foundation who are running a Patient Forum in South Wales later this year which will be attended by representatives of the Breathe Easy Patients Groups throughout Wales.

Co-ordinating emergency care

We identified that whilst our partnership with the WRVS provides an invaluable emergency service for vulnerable older and disabled customers, for medically dependent customers, specialist support is needed.

Developing and maintaining a partnership approach with Air Products will enable us to provide information during power cuts so that they can provide specialised assistance to oxygen dependent customers, in addition to the valuable service provided by the WRVS.

The benefits of this working relationship were realised during a severe weather situation in Powys in February 2007 when customers were expected to be off for several hours following a complicated fault on the overhead network in a remote area. WPD liaised with the Powys Emergency Planning Officer and Air Products to provide information and assistance to oxygen dependent customers without electricity. This included visits from Air Products to every customer affected and the provision of temporary generators where appropriate.

At our recent Charter Mark recertification visit, the independent Assessor commended this initiative as best practice for partnership working.

Quality of Supply Report

To raise the awareness of our PSR, we have featured it in a new section in our 2006 Quality of Supply Report. We publish the Report in English and Welsh.

On advice from the energywatch regional Priority Services Adviser that "*contact with Parish and Town Councils might be the most fruitful and most effective [means of communication]*" as "*it is at Parish and Town Council that contact is most likely with those who are in need of it[PSR]..*", we sent copies out to every level of local Council across our region – some 1500 in total – together with a covering letter highlighting the PSR.

We received positive feedback from this initiative. See attached stakeholder letter.

Information Packs for Priority Needs Customers

Following bad weather in December 2006, feedback from customers (particularly vulnerable customers), the WRVS and energywatch showed that customers would like better information to help them be prepared for power cuts.

We worked with the energywatch Priority Services regional advisers to develop a new leaflet giving useful information relating to power cuts. This gives advice on preparing for power cuts and also what to do during a power cut. The leaflet also includes details of how to join our Priority Services register, including a new dedicated email address, as suggested by energywatch.

We are sending this new leaflet out as a welcome pack to customers who join our Priority Services Register. We also confirm the details of their medical and other needs with them. We will also be using the leaflet to promote the PSR to customers and consumer organisations.

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12 April 2007

Ms Alison Sleightholm
Regulatory & Government Affairs Manager
Western Power Distribution
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Dear Ms Sleightholm

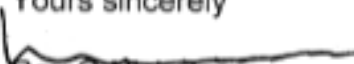
Quality of Supply Report 2006

Thank you for sending us the above Report which we read as a 'breath-of-fresh-air' in an age when there are so many organisations where no one is willing to accept responsibility!

This was discussed at our latest Meeting when the community councillors found the content to be informative and interesting – particularly, page 29 *First Time – Every Time*. As we are geographically part of the most isolated ward in Wales from services/facilities, your excellent record of uninterrupted supply is much appreciated by local people scattered amongst the villages of Cross Ash, Rockfield, Skenfrith, Newcastle, St Maughans and the Hendre.

Would you please convey these sentiments to all those concerned for this very satisfactory state of affairs.

Yours sincerely


Roy G Nicholas
Clerk to the Council