

How to Recruit ...

Directors in Transmission & Distribution



Contents

Introduction	3
What makes a good Director in T&D?	4
Key Competencies	7
Salary Benchmark	9
Example Job Description	11
Case Study	10
Executive Search Process	13



Introduction

With the UK market heavily investing in the energy sector, the demand for experienced professionals to lead and develop the future of energy in the UK is growing. In 2024, National Grid, the UK's largest electricity distribution network, announced their intentions to invest c£60 billion into the energy transition, both in the UK and internationally. Because of this unprecedented level of investment, securing leaders who can deliver these Transmission & Distribution programmes is key.

In this report, we break down the key considerations when searching for and interviewing Transmission & Distribution Directors. We establish what makes a good Operations/Project leader, as well as the differences in experience required for T&D roles depending on the hiring company and its needs. We will also consider key competencies to guide you through the interviewing process.

At Newsom Consulting we have over 26 years' experience finding leaders for some of the biggest infrastructure programmes in the UK. Some examples include:

- Sector Director, Energy – Tier 1 Contractor
- Operations Director, Renewable Grid Connections & Substations
- Managing Director, Energy
- Programme Director (T&D)
- Energy Sector Director
- Transmission & Distribution Project Director
- Project Director
- Future of Energy Executive Director – Distribution Network Operator
- National Grid - Delivery



What Makes a Good Director in T&D?

Firstly, consider the type of programme you are recruiting for. The candidates you are searching for will depend on project phase, company type, industry experience, commercial model, and size.

Project Phase

Ideally, a Director will have experience managing teams and Project Directors across all phases of delivery. Whether that be the development, procurement, construction delivery, commissioning, or handover phase. The difference between the development and the delivery phase is the most distinct.

In the early stages of a programme, it's crucial to have someone with experience in managing and leading teams through periods of uncertainty. The planning and design phase is one of the most unpredictable parts of a project's lifecycle. With T&D in particular, capital investment is expanding significantly, leading to a substantial increase in project volume. This often means recruiting an entirely new team within T&D, which calls for a Director who can confidently lead and navigate this team through the complex landscape of new business.

If the programme is entering into the construction delivery phase, the T&D Project Director will need to be accomplished in leading the operational delivery of the project, meeting or exceeding safety standards, achieving sustainability targets, and delivering customer satisfaction through effective client relationships.



Company Type

When recruiting for a **contractor**, there will be a broad pool of candidates with relevant contracting experience. While some may not have come from contractors focused exclusively on energy infrastructure (given that significant investment in the energy market is a relatively recent development in the UK) many projects in related infrastructure sectors such as rail, data centres, and new complex building construction rely heavily on efficient and reliable energy infrastructure to meet the demands of ongoing investment in these areas. As such, candidates with expertise in T&D may come from these sectors, despite not having worked for a contractor with a dedicated T&D division. It is also important to note that some contractors do have T&D subsidiaries, making these firms an excellent starting point.

If you are recruiting for a **client/asset owner**, it is more likely that the right candidate will have experience in both a large client-side company and contractors. In both company types, due to T&D having more linear construction, you may find that candidates often work on-site and are willing to travel to work locations (within reason). It is important that the contractually-based office is in a location that is likely to attract candidates, ideally with good travel links.

What Makes a Good Director in T&D?

Industry Experience

It's important to consider whether similar programmes have recently been completed in your geographical area. If there hasn't, then you need to work out what your next best alternative is.

For example, in Scotland, the capital spend in transmission & distribution for large projects is relatively new. Companies will be looking for a candidate that can spearhead the development of a T&D business. Whilst this a new market for many companies in the UK, international areas, such as mainland Europe, have done projects similar in size, scope, and value. Recruiters, therefore, can look internationally for candidates who fit the requirements.

Further, T&D is just one area of energy, it may not be fruitful to only search in this specialised area. Recruiters must ask themselves, what is the next best thing?

For this type of search, it can be beneficial to explore major energy projects and consider candidates from other power generation sectors, including onshore and offshore wind, renewable energy, hydrogen, and nuclear. While they may not currently be working within T&D, these types of programmes require similar expertise, creating significant crossover in the necessary knowledge and skills.

Additionally, candidates with experience in either transmission or distribution should not be overlooked, as their expertise is often transferable between the two areas.



Key Competencies

When we interview potential candidates, we assess them according to competency-based questions. These will differ for every role we recruit but these are the common key competencies we use when interviewing Director in T&Ds.

Results Orientation

- Taking accountability for meeting key business priorities
- Setting and working towards ambitious goals and quality standards
- Removing obstacles that threaten success

Building Relationships and Collaboration

- Building long-term relationships with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders
- Understanding the needs, concerns, and pressures of others
- Breaking business silos and encouraging cross-functional working
- Proactive in providing support to others
- Sharing knowledge, ideas, and feedback with colleagues

Leading Others

- Encouraging input from team
- Empowering people to perform independently
- Setting stretching goals, agreeing responsibility and holding others accountable
- Aligning goals with individuals' aspirations – motivating teams and driving high performance
- Balancing engagement and authority – tackling difficult issues proactively

Developing Strategy

- Developing and implementing insightful strategies to drive efficiency and growth
- Translating organisational objectives and strategies into meaningful operational plans
- Taking a long-term view of problems and opportunities
- Standing back and looking at the broader impact of actions – taking a holistic view

Commercial Thinking

- Analysing competitor activity and considering market trends
- Maximising revenue and margin
- Identifying opportunities for reducing costs
- Identifying opportunities for growth
- Developing a competitive advantage

Safety and Compliance

- Demonstrating and promoting behaviours that ensure safety objectives are met
- This is more relevant to contractor recruitment.
- Acting as a role model and proactive in tackling non-compliance across the business
- Identifying opportunities for improving safety performance and processes
- Implementing robust practices within own team, and across the business, to ensure strict compliance with all protocols relating to safety and information security
- Creating and setting the global standard and organisational strategy for safety.

Key Competencies

Here are a few example competency questions we have used when recruiting for Director in T&Ds:

When have you had to overcome challenges in the capacity of your supply chain?

What is an example of a successful major programme you have led the delivery of?

Give an example of a large-scale programme or project you've led. How did you ensure the programme stayed on track within budget, and met quality standards?

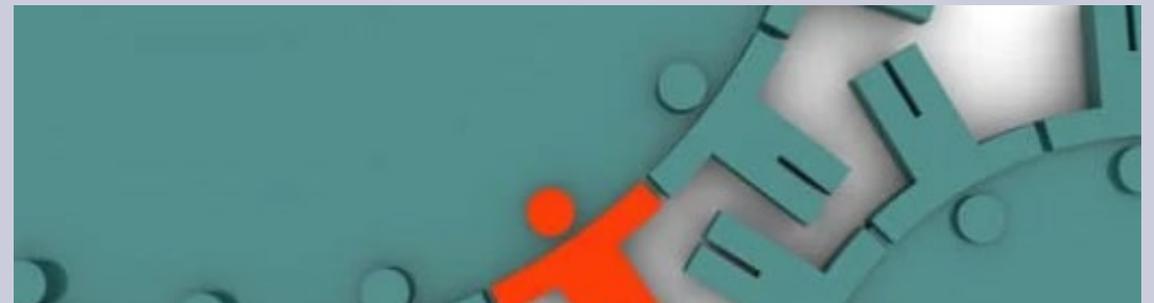
Can you give an example of where you have led a delivery organisation to significantly increase its scale of capital delivery?

How do you ensure effective communication among diverse teams, partners, and stakeholders in a programme.

Describe your approach to fostering effective collaboration. How do you effectively leverage the value of all employees and stakeholders to positively influence the success of your programmes?

Can you give an example of when you have had to significantly grow your project delivery team in a skills-scarce areas?

Give me an example of when you've had to respond to a major safety risk or incident. What was your approach?



Director in T&D Salary Benchmarking



Type of Company	Basic Salary		
	Low	Average	High
Contractor - Operations Director	£127,000	£174,000	£235,000
Contractor - Project Directors	£110,000	£146,000	£240,000
Freelance Contractors	£900	£1,400	£2,000
Client - Capital Directors	£120,000	£150,000	£350,000
Consultancy - Programme Directors	£120,000	£170,806	£302,000

This benchmark data is the basic salary only for Transmission & Distribution Directors working in Infrastructure in the UK and overseas. Overseas salaries have been converted to GBP using the current exchange rate for ease of comparison.

We have included salary information from client-side organisations for comparison.

We analysed the data across four key areas:

- Contractor, Operations Director.
- Contractor, Project Director.
- Client- Capital Delivery Directors.
- Client- Project Directors.
- Consultancies- Programme Director

The Directors in T&D in our benchmark manage a range of contracts; their responsibilities and salary vary according to the type and value of the projects they are leading. Generally, the more complex and higher value the programme, the higher the compensation. Some hardship locations offer a premium salary to attract suitably qualified candidates.

The information we are providing only details basic salary; it does not include car allowance, annual bonus or Long-Term Incentive Plan. Private sector employers will typically offer a car allowance, annual bonus of 30-50% and, in some cases, an LTIP.

Example Job Description

Company Overview

[Company Name] is seeking a highly motivated and experienced Project Director to establish and grow its UK Transmission & Distribution (T&D) business unit. While this is a new market for the organisation in the UK, it has a strong track record operating as an EPC contractor in the electricity T&D sector across mainland Europe.

The primary focus of this role will be to capitalise on emerging opportunities within major capital programmes led by key UK Transmission & Distribution stakeholders. The successful candidate will be responsible for strategically positioning the business to secure tier 1 and tier 2 design and build contracts, as well as identifying potential acquisitions to drive growth.



The Role:

The role focuses on overseeing the delivery of multiple projects within X's transmission and distribution portfolio, ensuring they are secured and executed successfully.

The candidate will be responsible for maintaining high safety standards, meeting financial targets, and building strong relationships with clients to ensure satisfaction.

They will also play a key role in creating an environment that supports effective teamwork and drives project growth, while prioritising sustainability and consistently delivering results that exceed expectations.

Example Job Responsibilities

Principle Accountabilities

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to grow the organisation's Transmission & Distribution business, fostering new industry partnerships.
- Identify and pursue opportunities within T&D infrastructure asset owners' capital programmes, as well as potential collaborations with other contractors.
- Conduct market analysis, assess opportunities, and manage pipeline trends within relevant market segments.
- Stay informed on industry trends, regulatory developments, and emerging technologies to identify business opportunities and mitigate risks.
- Identify and evaluate potential acquisition targets, leading negotiations and ensuring successful integration into operations.
- Build and maintain relationships with key clients and industry partners to identify viable opportunities in the sector.
- Establish bid teams to develop winning proposals, including structuring delivery teams, defining win themes, pricing strategies, commercial approaches, and risk management plans.

- Oversee the bidding process for tier 1 and tier 2 contracts, ensuring proposals align with strategic objectives and organisational capabilities while monitoring progress and addressing challenges as needed.
- Collaborate with internal teams to drive innovation and strengthen market positioning.
- Provide leadership and strategic direction as the Transmission & Distribution business grows, fostering a culture of innovation, excellence, and collaboration.
- Develop and communicate the operational strategy for the T&D business, ensuring it is effectively implemented at all levels to drive key outcomes in areas such as health and safety, quality, programme scheduling, financial performance, and client satisfaction.
- Oversee the financial performance of the T&D business unit, including budgeting, forecasting, and reporting.
- Build and lead high-performing bid, design, and construction teams.
- Drive the successful delivery of T&D projects through proactive client engagement from the early stages..

Example Job Qualifications

Qualifications and Experience

- Degree qualification in an appropriate discipline, or equivalent academic achievement or HNC/HND qualified with relevant sector experience.
- Technical and practical knowledge of the electricity T&D sector.
- Track record of growing business within the T&D sector, with a strong understanding of market dynamics, and competitive landscape.
- Experience in the UK electricity Transmission & Distribution market in a senior leadership role managing a business unit or portfolio of projects.
- Excellent leadership and communication skills, with the ability to inspire and motivate cross-functional teams to achieve common goals.



Case Study (Growing Into the T&D Market)

SPL Powerlines Group: Transmission & Distribution Director

The Client

SPL Powerlines Group is a prominent T1 contractor in the UK, specialising in overhead line equipment (OHLE) for rail networks. They were expanding their expertise, and establishing a new division focused on transmission and distribution (T&D) services.

SPL Powerlines Group, are a long-standing client of ours who have grown from £30m annual revenue in 2014 when we began working with them to £150m annual revenue today. We were excited to help them achieve their business goals.

The Brief

SPL were looking to recruit a Director for their Transmission & Distribution business capable of building this division from the ground up. The ideal candidate would possess a comprehensive knowledge of the UK T&D landscape and an extensive network of industry contacts.

They would also need strong leadership skills to assemble and guide a new team, a proven track record of managing P&L responsibilities and growing a division.

The ideal candidate for this role needed to be able to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to grow SPL's Transmission & Distribution business, cultivating new partnerships within the industry.

The Process

To identify potential candidates, we focused on researching contractors, consultancies, and other key suppliers operating within the Transmission and Distribution (T&D) sector across the UK.

Although the role's location was relatively flexible, we recognised that energy projects in Scotland would likely yield strong candidates. Following feedback from our longlist research, we approached selected candidates to discuss the opportunity.

One of the challenges we addressed was the candidates' hesitation in taking on the responsibility of building an entirely new function. It was crucial for us to convey that the successful candidate would have the autonomy to shape the new business according to their vision. Additionally, it was important to highlight SPL's proven track record of driving growth and increasing turnover, thereby assuring candidates that they would be joining a reliable and financially successful organisation.

The Outcome

The successful candidate brought extensive experience in Transmission and Distribution, including managing a P&L of a major tier 1 contractor involved in cabling, overhead lines (OHL), and substation work for major power clients. Notably, they successfully transformed a loss-making business unit, turning it around within two years. This candidate proved to be an ideal fit for the T&D Project Director role.

Executive Search Process

This is an overview of our executive search process. We would follow this method to find a successful T&D Project Director:

1. Research

We begin with a consultation to define the criteria, search strategy and compensation. The search is tailored to client requirements and sourced through our own in-house research. When we're confident we have sufficiently researched the market, we provide a longlist of potential candidates.

2. Approaches

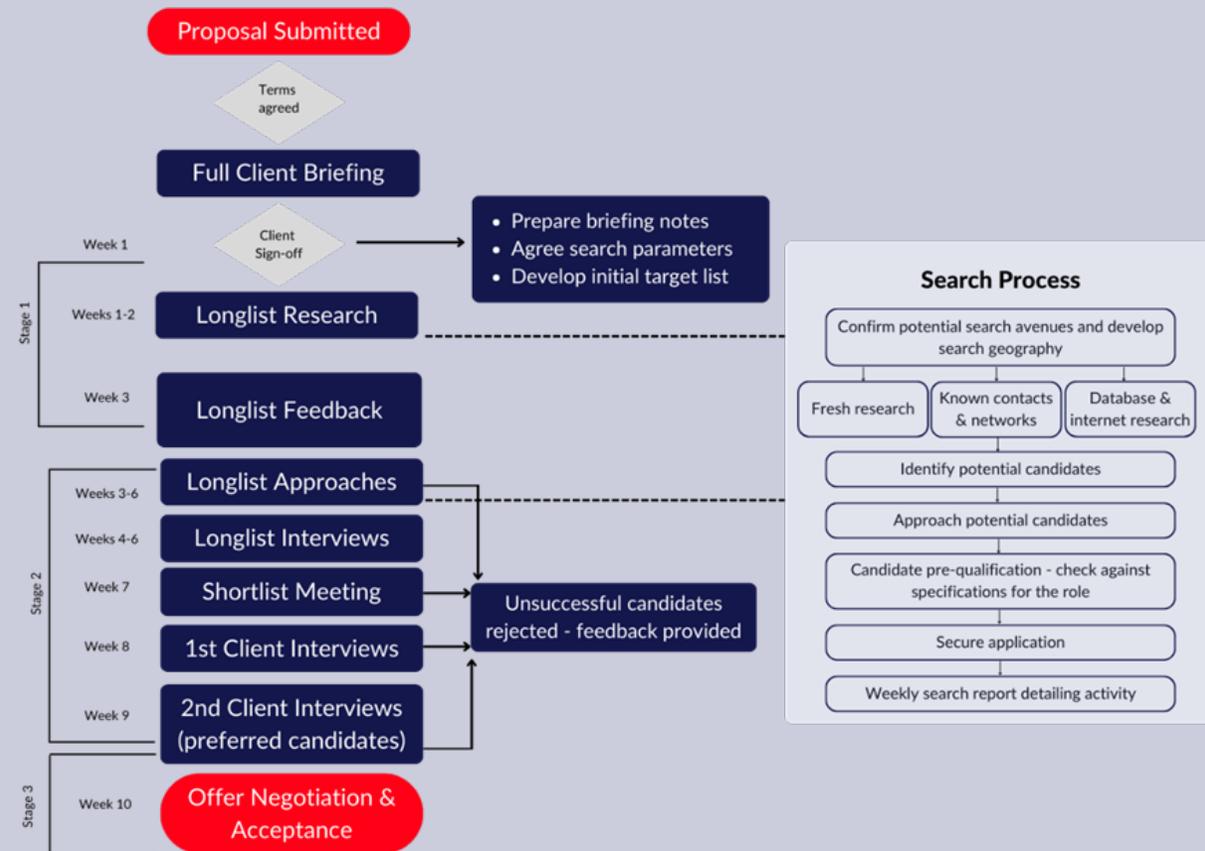
To find our shortlist of candidates, we approach potential candidates and advertise the role. We share a briefing document with candidates, outlining the role, the business and an overview of the remuneration package to ensure maximum interest from approached candidates.

3. Assessment

We conduct competency-based interviews with selected candidates. Personality Profiling and Ability Tests can be provided by us at this stage.

4. Shortlist to Offer

The outcome of this assignment will be a shortlist report which includes a full assignment summary with a statistical breakdown of the candidates, market feedback, candidate CVs, and typically a two-page Candidate Report per candidate including competency ratings.



Get in Touch

Newsom Consulting is an executive search firm that focuses on critical infrastructure and the built environment including, Rail, Aviation & Maritime, Highways, Utilities, Energy, Defence and Buildings sectors. Since we were founded in 2010, our team has successfully placed over 600 experienced industry executives – from executive leadership to senior management and leading technical experts.

Our clients include many of the leading infrastructure asset owners and major projects, contractors, public sector bodies, manufacturers, consultancies, and technology suppliers.

We are dedicated to fostering diversity within the industry and continually strive to enhance diversity in the senior teams of our clients. In the past two years, 33% of our placements have been either gender or ethnically diverse, and we remain committed to increasing the diversity of the industries we operate in.



For additional ideas on how to secure your next senior leaders get in touch. We look forward to talking with you soon.



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