

INSPECTION REPORT

National Tyre Service Limited

04 September 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

National Tyre Service Limited employs approximately 947 people. The company operates from a network of approximately 214 branches nationwide, providing motor vehicle fast fit services to the general public and car fleets. National Tyre Service Limited provides work-based training for young people in motor vehicle maintenance (fast fit) as part of a strategy to meet its need for trained employees. The head office is in Stockport, Cheshire and the main training centre in Bootle, Merseyside. National Tyre Service Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Continental AG. Continental AG is a large European company, which manufactures tyres, rubber belts, hoses and other car components, and which employs 62,000 people worldwide.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Foundation modern apprenticeship training is good and the leadership and management of the training are satisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

The training received by the 17 foundation modern apprentices is good. Both on- and off-the-job elements of training are well planned, and delivered by occupationally competent and qualified trainers and workplace mentors. There is some innovative teaching of key skills. Learners receive good support at work from their mentors, from the trainer/assessors and staff from the human resources department who conduct the regular progress reviews. Resources for both on- and off-the-job training are good. Recruitment processes are rigorous. Both retention and achievement rates are good. Initial assessment is thorough but the results of these tests are not always used to influence the learner's individual learning plan. Individual learning plans are not comprehensive or regularly updated.

Leadership and management

On- and off-the-job training are well managed. National Tyre Service Limited invests in the training and development of its staff. It is responsive to the needs of learners and employees and is quick to act on their comments. Internal verification arrangements are good. There are no documented quality assurance arrangements covering the training. There is a written equal opportunities policy and learners receive an introduction to equal opportunities during their induction which is reinforced by their handbook. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is too narrow. There is little promotion or monitoring of equal opportunities on the training programme.

GRADES

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good and well-managed on- and off-the-job training
- good training resources
- effective support for learners
- successful use of feedback for continuous improvement
- thorough internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- failure of individual learning plans to reflect learners' progress
- lack of quality assurance arrangements covering training
- insufficient monitoring of action plan

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of internal meetings

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. National Tyre Service Limited (National Tyres) employs approximately 947 people and is owned by Continental AG. Continental AG is a large European company, which manufactures tyres, rubber belts, hoses and other car components and employs 62,000 people worldwide. National Tyres has a network of approximately 214 branches nationwide providing motor vehicle fast fit services to the general public and car fleets. It began formally training modern apprentices, in 1998, as part of a strategy to meet its identified need for trained employees. It currently has 17 foundation modern apprentices. The head office is in Stockport, Cheshire and the main training centre in Bootle, Merseyside. A further training centre is currently being built in Berkshire. The training is managed by National Tyres' human resources department. Three staff manage the modern apprenticeship programme and there are four trainer/assessors. Other staff are involved in recruitment and progress reviews.

2. National Tyres contracts with Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for learners in England. However, learners are recruited on a national basis, according to the demands of the business as a whole and each of its branches. The unemployment rate in England was 2.9 per cent in September 2001, although it varied from 1.5 per cent in the Southeast to 5.2 per cent in the Northeast. The proportion of unemployed people aged between 18 and 24 in June 2001 was 20.5 per cent in the Southeast and 29 per cent in the Northeast, compared with a national average of 24.4 per cent. This reflects National Tyres' experiences, as its vacancies in the north of England attract many more applications than those in the south. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in England achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 49.2 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the population, varies widely between the travel-to-work areas of each of National Tyres' local branches, from 1.4 per cent in the Northeast to over 20 per cent in parts of London and the Midlands.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at National Tyres in September 2001. They interviewed 15 of the 17 learners and carried out 26 interviews with staff. They visited the head offices in Stockport, the training centre in Bootle, and 10 local branches throughout England and one in Scotland. Inspectors observed two training and assessment sessions. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, National Tyres' plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and reports from the awarding body. Inspectors studied the self-assessment report, which was produced by National Tyres in June 2000 and updated in August 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	17	2

4. National Tyres sets itself an annual target for the recruitment of learners in the United Kingdom. This target is met by recruiting learners to local branches which can provide an appropriate training environment. Recruitment is generally through the careers service, although many young people apply directly to National Tyres, particularly those who have been on work experience with the company or worked in a branch part time before leaving school. Personnel conduct local recruitment interviews that include tests on English, comprehension, mathematics and health and safety. National Tyres provides training for the motor vehicle maintenance (fast fit) national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2, as part of a foundation modern apprenticeship, lasting 18 months. Those learners selected attend a one-week residential induction course at the training centre in Bootle. This involves initial skills assessment and an introduction to the company, its policies and procedures and a start to training on tyre maintenance. All learners are employed and attached to a local branch where they return for their on-the-job training. Branch managers provide on-the-job training and also act as workplace mentors. Learners return regularly to the training centre for 12 courses on the technical knowledge needed for their work and to meet their qualification requirements, including key skills training. National Tyres' assessors conduct NVQ assessment in the workplace. Learners receive regular progress reviews from a personnel officer in conjunction with their branch manager.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	18		38		10		5		12	
Still in training	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100	12	100
FMA framework completed	4	22	11	29	7	70	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	5	28	11	29	7	70	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework	14	78	27	71	3	30	0	0	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good on- and off-the-job training
- good training resources
- effective support for learners
- highly effective recruitment practices

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate use of initial assessment results
- failure of individual learning plans to reflect learners' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of portfolios by learners

5. Training is good, both at work and off the job. Off-the-job training takes place at a dedicated training centre in Bootle. Learners attend the centre for a series of 12 five-day residential courses. The first of these is an induction. This is thorough and equips the learners to be immediately useful in the workplace. The remaining courses cover technical areas and three weeks are allocated to the development of learners' key skills. The training courses are well delivered and appropriate to the learners' employment and qualification needs. There is good promotion of workplace discipline and health and safety. Training staff visit the learners in the branches, regularly, to carry out workplace assessment and to provide additional training as needed.

6. Both on- and off-the-job training resources are good. The training centre is well resourced with three vehicle lifts, spacious workshop accommodation, classroom and restroom facilities and a plentiful supply of cars to allow real work. There is a variety of equipment and tools relevant to the work learners will do in the workplace. The training staff are very experienced in the occupational area and are skilled at teaching. All trainers have, or are working towards, assessor qualifications.

7. Learners receive good support during their training from their branch managers, who are their mentors, to reinforce what they have learned at the Bootle centre. Branch managers are very experienced and fully understand their role as mentors. National Tyres has recently given all branch managers a guidance manual about their mentor role. Branch managers recognise National Tyres' commitment to training and are actively providing a good and useful experience for the learners. Many mentors carry

out regular individual progress reviews with their learners, in addition to the reviews carried out as part of the modern apprenticeship scheme. Staff at the branches are experienced in the industry and work as a close team, supporting learners. As each learner becomes more skilled and confident, the level of supervision from branch managers and other staff is reduced. Learners receive visits at least every six weeks. These visits are alternately from the assessor, for assessment purposes, and from a personnel officer, to carry out a progress review. Progress reviews involve a three-way meeting between the learner, branch manager and personnel officer. They are thorough and cover matters related to the learners' training and personal development. An individual interview with the reviewer follows, without the mentor, providing an opportunity for the learner to raise any more confidential matters. A standard checklist used during the review, ensures that the learner can raise any concerns or personal problems. Problems affecting learners outside of work can also be raised and National Tyres helps where possible. For example, one learner is taken home each evening, following an incident which took place at a bus stop after work. During the residential training, the learners are accommodated in a good hotel, and receive all their meals and taxi transport to and from the training centre.

8. The recruitment process is highly effective in selecting learners who meet the needs of National Tyres. Recruitment procedures are rigorous. National Tyres looks at applicants' age and qualifications, but also take account of any previous work experience. All applicants are interviewed. The interview is structured with standard, pre-set questions and includes a selection test. At each stage in the recruitment process, decisions about applicants are fully discussed by all staff involved in recruitment, to ensure consistency. These measures are very successful. Since the introduction of these procedures in August 2000 there has been 100 per cent retention. Many previous modern apprentices still work for National Tyres.

9. The results of initial assessment tests are not used as a basis for the learners' training programmes. All learners take a basic skills tests during their induction, to identify any learning support needs. The results of these tests are recorded by staff, but are not clearly explained to learners, nor are they recorded in their portfolios or individual learning plans. Some learners have been identified as requiring additional support but National Tyres has not decided how to meet these needs. Many learners have worked in a local branch of National Tyres part time before they left school. Others have skills such as knowledge of computers. However, these previous skills or experiences are not formally assessed and do not influence the training programme.

10. Individual learning plans do not take account of each individual learner's needs and are not updated to reflect what the learner is doing. They are used only to record the qualifications the learners are working towards. They do not contain results of the initial assessment tests or the learner's prior knowledge or experience. Learners do not remember the plans being drawn up and do not have their own copies. Nor do personnel officers have copies, so they cannot refer to, or adjust, the plans when carrying out progress reviews.

11. Learners have no sense of ownership or pride in their portfolios. The evidence used is varied, including photographs, witness statements, job cards and work packs, but portfolios are very similar and follow a specified structure. For example, witness statements are pre-typed and only have to be signed. The tasks shown in photographic evidence are identified, with only the learner being different each time. Learners are told what should be included in the portfolio and do not take responsibility for gathering appropriate evidence themselves. Learners complete their portfolios at work and at the training centre. There is no urgency to complete the portfolio and learners are progressing too slowly, especially those due to complete early in 2002.

Good Practice

During one of the residential training weeks, the learners have to organise a day or evening out. This is used as evidence towards, at least, two key skills, the use of information technology and working with others. This is an effective and innovative use of project work for gathering evidence. It has an outcome, which is a pleasurable and memorable experience for the learners.

At the start of their training, learners are offered a good-quality tool kit, valued at around £600, which they pay back at £30 each month to spread the cost. This means learners can then start in the workplace with their own tools, rather than having to borrow from others. It gives them a degree of independence and encourages care and proper use of the tools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

12. National Tyres' foundation modern apprenticeship programme is managed by its human resources division, based at the head office in Stockport. Overall responsibility is held by the central services director with the everyday running of the training overseen by human resources staff. The training and safety manager and the training support officer act as internal verifiers and control the administration of the training. Nationally there are three trainer/assessors who are responsible for learners in National Tyres' branches and one trainer/assessor who is based in the training centre. Two personnel officers, between them, visit learners to carry out progress reviews in the branches. National Tyres has a three-year strategic development plan, which has specific targets and objectives and is monitored and reviewed regularly. National Tyres has an equal opportunities policy, which it reviews annually. There is no formal quality assurance system. The self-assessment report was written in June 2000.

STRENGTHS

- high priority for training
- well managed on- and off-the-job training
- effective staff development programme
- successful use of learner and staff feedback for continuous improvement
- thorough internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate equal opportunities awareness among learners
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities
- lack of quality assurance arrangements covering training
- insufficient monitoring of action plan

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of internal meetings
- more detailed progress review document

13. National Tyres is strongly committed to training. Its strategic plan recognises the business benefits of training and development and staff development is a key business objective. This commitment is reflected in the great importance managers place on the modern apprenticeship training and the large investment of resources in it. In addition to the team of trainers, mentors, and the human resources staff who undertake the learner reviews and recruitment, three staff manage the training programme.

14. On- and off-the-job training is well managed and co-ordinated. All learners, their parents, branch managers, regional managers and human resource staff have copies of a

comprehensive training schedule which shows when learners are due to be reviewed, assessed and attend the off-the-job training centre. Off-the-job training is planned to allow time for the learners to practice the skills learned in the workplace, following the block training weeks. The residential courses are planned at least 12 months in advance. This enables managers to plan for when learners will be away and to identify what type of work the learner can do between courses to develop their skills. Branch managers in their mentoring role, and trainer/assessors check what learners have learned after each course and carry out any additional training in the branches if required. The overall training plan is co-ordinated and monitored in the head office by the training support officer, with other staff members having responsibility for various aspects of the programme, including work-based assessments and reviews. Reviews take place regularly, but review documents contain neither enough questions for learners nor enough space for learners' comments. Managers identify and meet learners' needs as well as responding to learners' concerns. However, much of the management activity is informal. Meetings do not have formal agendas or minutes, and there are few records of decision-making and actions taken.

15. National Tyres has an effective staff training and development programme. Staff development needs are identified through the annual staff appraisal system and all staff are involved in some form of personal development. National Tyres allows staff the time and funding for all work-related training and also supports personal development that is not business-related, either by allowing time off for study or by financial contribution. All training is recorded on the personnel departments' management information system. All branch managers have recently taken an in-house management training programme, which includes equal opportunities training. Additional training has been given for new workplace mentors. Recently, National Tyres has introduced information systems to analyse data, for example, about recruitment, initial assessment retention and achievement. However, there has not yet been any serious consideration of these data.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

16. The central services director has overall responsibility for equality of opportunity within the organisation. There is an equal opportunities policy with an accompanying equal opportunities policy statement. Human resource department staff have received training on current equal opportunities legislation. Both they and the branch managers have recently attended training on equal opportunities practice related to recruitment. They pass information from this training on to other staff. Staff induction includes the organisation's commitment to equality of opportunity. The equal opportunities policy is given to learners during their induction week. The learners' handbook contains information on the grievance and harassment procedures and all learners are aware of how to raise any problems. National Tyres has taken rigorous and effective action to protect learners from harassment. However, staff and learners lack an awareness and understanding of broader equal opportunities issues. Learners are not familiar with the NVQ appeals procedure. Equality of opportunity is not reinforced during their formal progress reviews and is not emphasised in the workplaces.

17. National Tyres does not actively promote itself as an equal opportunities employer. It does not display positive images within the company. Materials for the foundation modern apprenticeship training and other company documents do not contain any equal opportunities messages, although a positive photographic image appears on the marketing leaflet. The company has recently begun to collect and analyse equal opportunities data about all applicants but these have not yet been used to bring about any changes in recruitment activity.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

18. National Tyres has a quality assurance manual, which contains procedures covering most aspects of its activities and administrative processes, but there is little reference to the quality of training. There are no recorded quality assurance arrangements showing how training is monitored, analysed and evaluated to ensure its quality. Induction and off-the-job training sessions, both theory and practical, are observed regularly. Feedback is given to the trainer but there is no written record of the observation. National Tyres collects the views of learners and staff frequently, using interviews and informally through regular meetings with mentors, human resources staff and designated training staff. It has recently introduced a formal exit survey for all learners, both early leavers and those completing their training. The results are currently being analysed. National Tyres responds positively and promptly to the learners' feedback to bring about improvements, including changes to the learners' travel arrangements, reallocation of trainers and providing information packs for mentors.

19. Internal verification is thorough and exceeds the validating body's requirements. All of the evidence in every portfolio is verified. All assessors are observed carrying out assessment in the workplace. There is an annual plan of verification activities. Internal verifiers, trainers and assessors meet regularly to consider the operation of the training programme and to share good practice. These meetings are not formally minuted or recorded. The self-assessment report presented for inspection was produced 15 months earlier in June 2000. The self-assessment process was thorough and most judgements were based on evidence. Although there is much evidence of action to improve the training being taken as a result, the action plan has not been monitored and the self-assessment report has not been adequately updated.