

INSPECTION REPORT

Northampton Industrial Training Association Limited

10 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

Northampton Industrial Training Association Limited is a charitable organisation which was founded in 1969. Its original purpose was to administer and manage the training and development of engineers throughout Northamptonshire, in conjunction with the Engineering Industry Training Board. The portfolio of training has since expanded and now includes business administration, distribution and warehousing operations, customer service, and training and development as well as engineering. The company is based in Corby. It has a contract with the Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council.

Overall judgement

The quality of work-based learning in engineering is satisfactory. Leadership and management is satisfactory, and the overall provision is adequate to meet the needs of those receiving it.

Work-based learning for young people

Learners are able to gain qualifications in most engineering crafts and they have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications including higher national certificates. There is a wide range of employers. Training programmes and additional qualifications are negotiated by the learner, trainer and the employer. The resources for training are generally good. Induction is thorough and effective, and it is reinforced by a comprehensive manual. Learners receive good occupational and personal support from both employers and trainers. Visits to learners at work and at college during off-the-job training are regular and frequent. However, employers and learners are unclear about the national vocational qualification (NVQ) framework. Workplace training often concentrates on the learner's job role and not on what is needed for the qualification. Employers are poorly informed of learners' progress towards the achievement of their qualifications. Learners' portfolios of evidence are generally satisfactory, but assessment and internal verification practice is poor. Assessment is not always planned, and there is insufficient observation of learners and assessors in the workplace. The lead verifier has identified some poor practice but the action taken as a result has not led to improvement. Learners' progress reviews are poorly recorded. There is insufficient action-planning and the actions taken are not always monitored. Individual learning plans are incomplete and not updated regularly. Previous experience or additional learning needs are not always recorded. Retention rates on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes are poor.

Leadership and management

The management is open and supportive. Staff are well informed of company developments and performance. They work closely as a team and are supported by each other and by managers. Job descriptions and lines of communication are clear. Staff appraisal is effective. External relations are good. Employers speak highly of their relationship with the company. Training provided by subcontractors is closely monitored. Regular meetings with subcontractors are held to improve the learners' experience. The company has an equal opportunities policy. Learners are aware of the procedures to be followed in the event of harassment and bullying. An equal opportunities action plan is under consideration but there is no equal opportunities strategy and the promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities are inadequate. The company is responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Complaints are treated as opportunities for improvement, all issues are investigated promptly and action taken. However, there are no documented quality assurance arrangements to indicate how training is monitored, analysed and evaluated to ensure its quality. There is no formal procedure for the identification and sharing of good practice.

GRADES

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- open and supportive management
- exceptionally good range of learning opportunities
- good occupational and personal support for learners
- responsive to the needs to learners and employers
- effective appraisal leading to staff development

KEY WEAKNESSES

- understanding of the NVQ framework by employees and learners
- poor assessment and internal verification practice
- no systematic process for assuring the quality of learning
- lack of equal opportunities strategy

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more critical self-assessment

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Northampton Industrial Training Association Limited (NITAL) is a charitable organisation, which was founded in 1969. Its original purpose was to administer and manage the training and development of engineers throughout Northamptonshire, in conjunction with the Engineering Industry Training Board. The scope of the training has since expanded. It now includes business administration, distribution and warehousing operations, customer service, and other training and development as well as engineering. The company is based in Corby. It has a contract with the Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It has a sister company, Castle Management, which provides commercial training and consultancy.

2. The population of Northamptonshire is 586,000. In September 2001, the rate of unemployment was 2 per cent, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. Within the county, the rate varied from 2.4 per cent in Corby to 1.1 per cent in South Northamptonshire. In the 1991 census, the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups was 4.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. Within the county, the proportion varied from 7.2 per cent in Wellingborough to 1 per cent in East Northamptonshire. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 48 per cent, compared with the national figure of 49.2 per cent.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of five inspectors based at the company's headquarters in Corby spent a total of 20 days at NITAL in September 2001. They carried out 19 interviews with staff including the chief executive and the chair of the board. They visited the premises of 26 employers throughout Northamptonshire, and interviewed 22 employers, including three work-based assessors. Inspectors visited the premises of the two training subcontractors and interviewed the subcontractors' staff. Inspectors interviewed 54 learners and observed assessment sessions. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature, awarding bodies' reports, subcontractor agreements and the local LSC contract. Inspectors studied NITAL's self-assessment report and the resulting action plan.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	115	3

4. NITAL offers a wide range of NVQs in engineering. These include programmes in mechanical engineering, manufacturing and motor vehicle engineering. There are 115 learners on engineering programmes. Of these, 44 are advanced modern apprentices and 15 are foundation modern apprentices. Ninety-five learners are working towards one or more of a range of engineering qualifications, 14 are enrolled on motor vehicle awards and six are following programmes leading to qualifications in manufacturing. Learners are recruited by advertising and by company referral. All are employed by their companies. All learners attend a two-day induction at the start of their programme, which includes an initial assessment of basic skills. Most learners attend local further education colleges for day release to support their work-based learning. All assessment for level 3 NVQ takes place at the workplace. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice, and found more weaknesses than those identified in the report.

The following tables show 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			9		17		15		0	
Still in training			5	56	5	29	5	33	0	0
FMA framework completed			0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			2	22	7	41	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			5	56	11	65	10	67	0	0

NORTHAMPTON INDUSTRIAL TRAINING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	14		24		30		29		0	
Still in training	1	7	6	25	17	57	20	69	0	0
AMA framework completed	2	14	7	29	1	3	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	8	57	7	29	8	27	10	34	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	2	14	8	33	3	10	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework	11	79	11	46	11	37	9	31	0	0

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started	111		87		73		40		0	
Still in training	3	3	7	8	21	29	26	65	0	0
Individual learning plan completed	21	19	18	21	18	25	4	10	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan	77	69	48	55	33	45	10	25	0	0
NVQ level 1 completed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	38	34	30	34	26	36	3	8	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	18	16	12	14	5	7	2	5	0	0

STRENGTHS

- exceptionally good range of learning opportunities
- thorough induction
- good occupational and personal support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate understanding of the NVQ framework by employers and learners
- poor assessment and internal verification
- inadequate progress reviews and individual learning plans
- poor retention rates on foundation modern apprenticeships

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better integration of key skills
- more thorough monitoring of health and safety at employers' premises

5. Learners experience an exceptionally good range of learning opportunities. NITAL arranges training at engineering and motor vehicle companies throughout Northamptonshire. Their activities include the manufacture of mechanical pumps, robotics, stainless steel fabrication and the production of Formula One racing car engines. Learners are able to gain qualifications in most engineering crafts and additional technician qualifications, including higher national certificates at local colleges. Before learners are recruited onto a training programme, NITAL's training advisers investigate thoroughly the range of work each employer can provide for learners. Training programmes and additional qualifications are negotiated by the learner, trainer and the employer. Resources for training in college and in the workplace are generally good. Most employers enable learners to train in all departments of their companies to widen their experience. Arrangements are made for learners to gain experience at other employers' premises to achieve competences towards their qualifications. Some learners have opportunities to work overseas.

6. Induction is thorough and effective. In addition to a workplace induction by the employer and an induction in the college, all learners have a two-day induction at NITAL's headquarters, which includes an assessment of their basic skills. The induction is comprehensive. It fully explains the programme of activities and allows learners to meet the trainers, assessors and the vocational operations manager. A team-building exercise consisting of building a tall structure from toy building blocks is much enjoyed. There is appropriate emphasis on health and safety and equality of opportunity. Induction is reinforced by a comprehensive manual, and by additional input in the workplace. During induction learners experience the same level of hospitality, resource and training as NITAL's corporate clients. Learners value induction. They find it enjoyable and memorable.

7. Learners receive good occupational and personal support from both employers and trainers. NITAL staff regularly visit learners at work, and at college during off-the-job training. The frequency of visits exceeds the contractual requirement. Learners can contact trainers at any time by mobile phones. At one large employer, training advisers hold weekly drop-in sessions to provide guidance and support for learners. These sessions include guidance on portfolio-building. NITAL staff have organised new employment for learners who have been made redundant. Two employers have work-based assessors. At one employer, two assessors are working towards the internal verifier award. NITAL trainers support the training of verifiers. Learners are well supported by the work-based assessors. Additional learning support is provided at college. Learners who live in rural areas are provided with taxis to attend college courses in the evening. NITAL holds an annual award ceremony to celebrate the success of its learners which is well attended by employers and parents. Some learners

are successful in national skills competitions.

8. Many employers and learners are unclear about the NVQ framework and their roles and responsibilities within it. Workplace training concentrates on the learner's job role and not on what is needed for the NVQ. Some learners are unclear about their current qualifications and key skills requirements. Learners do not always understand what evidence will be useful and much evidence which is collected remains unused. Employers are generally unaware of learners' progress towards the achievement of their qualifications. A support pack designed to guide learners in identifying evidence which meets the criteria for NVQs has recently been introduced. Learners have found the pack extremely useful. All training advisers undertake a two-day training course on managing safety. One training adviser has achieved the national safety officers' qualification. Employers are made aware of their obligations with regard to health and safety. However, during visits to some workplaces, inspectors observed learners not wearing safety footwear.

9. Assessment and verification practice is poor. Learners' portfolios of evidence for the level 3 NVQ are generally satisfactory. Some portfolios contain good evidence which includes diagrams, work schedules, photographs and comprehensive reports on the work carried out. However, some of this evidence has not been assessed for over nine months. Assessment is not always planned and there is insufficient observation of learners in the workplace. Assessor reports lack sufficient detail and are unsigned. There is insufficient assessment of key skills in the workplace. NITAL has produced a guidance document for internal verification, but this lacks detail and the guidance is not always followed. The poor practice observed by inspectors included internal verifiers failing to refer to performance criteria to monitor standards, not recording what was observed, disrupting the process by chatting with the learner, and failing to provide feedback on performance to assessors.

10. Reviews of learners' progress and individual learning plans are inadequate. The reviews are frequent but workplace supervisors are not involved. Learners, supervisors and college tutors receive a copy of the review. Many reviews give insufficient attention to the setting and monitoring of targets. Review documents are brief. This does not encourage detailed recording of the interaction of action-planning. Agreed actions are not always monitored. Individual learning plans are incomplete and not updated regularly. Previous experience or additional learning needs may not be recorded. One learner, for example, was identified as dyslexic but the additional support requirements were not recorded. Individual learning plans are not adjusted as a result of previous skills or experience. One learner who had previously gained an advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) was required to complete key skills at level 2 again. The completion dates for the achievement of units towards the NVQ are standard. However, each learner has two different individual learning plans. These contain different information and lead to confusion. Retention rates on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes are poor. They have decreased over the last three years from 44 per cent in 1998-99 to only 32 per cent in 2000-01.

Good Practice

NITAL staff have produced an action plan support pack to help learners understand the collection of evidence required for their NVQ. The packs are well written and easy to understand. Each contains details of units and elements for a particular NVQ.

NITAL provides every learner who has completed the NVQ training programme with a learner leaving reference. This is a useful and attractive document which states learners' NVQ achievements and clearly identifies their strengths. Leavers are proud of this reference.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

11. NITAL was founded in 1969. It is a limited company of registered charitable status with a board of directors drawn from local employers. In addition to the chief executive, NITAL employs eight full-time staff for the roles of management, programme co-ordination, adviser/assessor, equal opportunities liaison and administration. A further two staff are employed on a subcontract basis in adviser/assessor roles. NITAL has an equal opportunities policy. NITAL has a quality assurance system that is internally and externally audited to meet the standards of ISO 9001, an international standard for quality assurance. NITAL was accredited with the Investors in People award in 1998. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. This accreditation was renewed in May 2001. The first self-assessment report was written in 1998. The latest self-assessment report was produced in April 2001.

STRENGTHS

- open and supportive management
- effective staff appraisal leading to staff development
- productive external relationships
- good management of subcontractor
- responsiveness to the needs of learners and employers

WEAKNESSES

- lack of an equal opportunities strategy
- inadequate promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- no systematic process for assuring the quality of learning
- poor internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more critical self-assessment

12. NITAL's management is open and supportive. Staff are well informed of company developments and performance. They work closely as a team and are supported by each other and by managers. The company has adapted its working practices to support staff through illness and difficulty. Job descriptions and lines of communication are clear. The operations manager attends board meetings and the chief executive attends the monthly team meetings. This encourages the flow of information and enables staff to contribute fully at meetings in which ideas and information are shared. Team meetings have considered learners' performance, and the learners' induction was introduced as part of a plan to improve retention. The board responds to input from the staff. At the request of the operations manager it changed its financial year to reflect the contract it holds with the funding body.

13. Staff appraisal is thorough and effective. Appraisal is carried out annually in an appropriate environment. Managers are well prepared. Staff assess themselves before the appraisal against clearly defined criteria. Realistic targets are set. These targets cover both personal development and NITAL's business plan. Senior managers' targets relate directly to the LSC contract. The targets for other staff relate to the recruitment, retention and progression of the learners. Training and development needs are discussed, and training is arranged to allow the member of staff to gain the appropriate qualification or experience. The company invests in its staff through training. All assessors have assessor and verification qualifications. All staff have an audit qualification and additional qualifications suited to their current and future employment. Staff welcome the opportunity to take additional responsibility.

14. External relations are good. Employers spoke highly of the support they receive from NITAL staff. NITAL staff have good relations with employers and careers officers and are building relations with schools. The board of NITAL includes representatives of local industry. The operations manager regularly visits many companies to discuss learners' progress and current and future plans. NITAL has recently produced and distributed a publication informing employers of the content of training courses and their responsibility for training. A recent meeting and awards ceremony for apprentices was well attended by employers. The relationship between NITAL and one subcontractor who provides training and assessment for engineering is extremely productive. This partnership has made a number of successful joint funding bids which have benefited NITAL learners.

15. The training provided by subcontractors is closely monitored. Service level agreements clearly state the responsibilities of the subcontractor and NITAL, and the agreements are reviewed regularly. The views of learners and employers are sought. Regular meetings are held with subcontractors. There are comprehensive procedures to monitor subcontractors' performance and improve the learners' experience.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

16. NITAL has an equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of legislation and is updated annually, but lacks a strategy for equal opportunities. The chief executive is currently considering an equal opportunities action plan. There is no monitoring of equal opportunities. NITAL is aware that there are no women learners, but there are no plans for positive action to recruit them. The recruitment of learners is primarily the responsibility of the employers. NITAL is unaware of the level of promotion of equal opportunities which employers carry out, and does not support employers in recruiting from under-represented groups. Some companies have good role models who could be used to promote engineering programmes to under-represented groups, but this resource is not being used. Some positive initiatives previously funded by the chamber of commerce such as multilingual advertising have now been discontinued.

17. A copy of the equal opportunities policy is included in the handbook for learners and the guide for employers. Equality of opportunity is included in the induction for learners. They remember the induction, and are aware of the procedures to be followed in the event of harassment and bullying. A junior member of staff has recently been given the responsibility for equal opportunities liaison and has attended an external training event. The information from this training has been shared with all staff.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

18. NITAL is responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Induction is now routinely evaluated and improvements are made. NITAL encourages learners' comments and values them as an opportunity for improvement. Learners' views are gained formally through exit surveys. The views of employers and learners are gained informally through regular contact and visits. Issues identified through these sources are investigated and action taken. However, this action is not always discussed or fully recorded as part of the quality improvement process. There is no procedure for the identification and sharing of good practice. All staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report. However, the report was not sufficiently self-critical and failed to identify key weaknesses. Some of the strengths identified were judged by inspectors to be no more than normal practice.

19. The ISO 9001 accreditation held by NITAL has procedures and work instructions which cover some of the administrative procedures of the learning process. However, an internal audit is not planned to ensure that the administrative procedures are being followed. There are no documented quality assurance arrangements to indicate how on- and off-the-job training is monitored, analysed and evaluated to ensure its quality. Subcontracting arrangements for off-the-job training do not specify the standard of training required. The training manager observes the off-the-job training undertaken by subcontractors, but it is not planned and its outcomes are not recorded.

20. Internal verification is poor. A member of staff has recently been allocated the responsibility of lead verifier. As a result some poor practice has been identified, but the action taken has not led to improvement. The company has an internal verification guidance document and a sampling schedule, but these lack detail and are not always followed. There is insufficient monitoring of assessors' performance by observation. One work-based assessor has never been observed. The feedback provided to assessors is inadequate.