

National Tyre Service Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53465

Name of lead inspector: Bob Busby HMI

Last day of inspection: 15th January 2010

Type of provider: Employer
National Tyre Service Limited
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Address:

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Information about the provider

1. National Tyre Service Ltd (NTS) is the largest independent fast-fit company in the country employing almost 1,000 staff and operating a network of 209 branches in England, Scotland and Wales. The company was purchased from its previous owners at the end of 2001 and is part of a larger group, Axle Group Holdings, which employs 1,300 people and has an annual turnover of more than £160m. Government funding represents less than 1% of the company's annual turnover.
2. NTS has offered apprenticeship training in motor vehicle service replacement (fast-fit) for young people since 1998, supported by funding from Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). NTS employs 18 apprentices each year. The human resources department has prime responsibility for the apprenticeship training programme and currently consists of a team of 12 staff of whom 10 are directly involved in the training programmes. The company has expanded its provision since the previous inspection. All apprentices work in the motor vehicle sector. Approximately 94% of learners are male and 3% are from minority ethnic groups.
3. Training is provided through residential courses at two dedicated training centres in Gloucester and Bootle. On-the-job training is supported by branch managers who are trained as mentors.
4. The provider does not provide training on behalf of any other organisation.
5. NTS recruits apprentices nationally. Currently, 35 apprentices are working towards a framework of study including level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in motor vehicle engineering service replacement (fast-fit). All learners are employed by the company and are based in branches throughout the United Kingdom. Training and assessment are carried out at their workplace. The apprentices attend at least 12 residential training courses, each of one week's duration throughout the programme, in one of the company's two training centres; courses cover the technical, key skills and on-line skills required for the specific testing aspects of the programme.
6. The following organisation provides assessment on behalf of the provider:
 - Asset Training (potential level of key skills assessment)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	32 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Transportation operations and maintenance	2

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of the provision at NTS is good. Directors and senior managers provide good leadership and their capacity to make further improvements is also good. Training and development, including the apprenticeship programme, have a clear priority within the company. Senior staff have managed effectively the expansion of the apprenticeship provision and have firm plans to expand the provision further. Operational management of the programme is good. NTS has implemented a number of key improvements since the previous inspection, including the introduction of a new quality system and a clearer structure to reviews, which are now better understood by learners. Training staff work well with branch managers to provide good training and support at work that meet well the needs of learners and employers. Outcomes for learners are good and their progress is also good. Timely success rates are high. Assessment is well planned and managed. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Learners say they feel safe and protected from abuse. NTS has satisfactory arrangements to promote equality and diversity but reinforcement throughout learners' programmes is not sufficient. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity.

Main findings

- Apprenticeship timely success rates are high and overall success rates are satisfactory. Overall success rates were 75% in 2008/09, slightly above national success rates. Timely success rates were high at 71% in 2008/09, well above national timely rates.
- Learners have a positive attitude to training and develop good employability skills and increased confidence. They gain industry-specific qualifications, which lead to increased confidence when dealing with customers and colleagues. Some learners move on to other positions within the company, for example to assistant or branch manager positions.
- Learners enjoy their studies. For many it is their only experience of training or teaching and learning since leaving school. They find some aspects of their learning initially difficult compared to their practical work, but as they progress, assessing and accrediting their competence becomes enjoyable. Learners feel safe and free from harassment or bullying in the branches and the training centres. The depots provide a safe working environment. Learners' understanding of health and well-being are satisfactory, as is the promotion of these aspects by the company.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The planning of most teaching sessions is good and takes account effectively of learners' needs. Staff use good questioning techniques to check learners' knowledge and understanding and provide positive reinforcement. However, some tutors use a limited range of training styles and do not take sufficient account of individual learners' needs.
- Courses meet the needs of learners and employers well. The provision meets the needs and interests of learners and branch managers' requirements. The organisation of the training is tailored successfully to suit the apprentices', branch and business needs. Staff and assessors use their skills effectively and provide relevant training, as well as practical and technical support to learners.
- NTS provides good support for learners throughout their programme. Staff who are responsible for learners at each branch have received mentoring training to help them support learners. Learners are very positive about the support that they receive and are also aware of the wider support arrangements throughout the company.
- Target setting is too short-term. Most assessors set measurable targets for learners' achievements but some of the targets are imprecise and difficult to measure. Some staff do not use individual learning plans effectively.
- Strategic management is strong. The board of directors has a clear commitment to training and development within the organisation. NTS directors and managers view the apprenticeship programme as a key component in its drive to improve staff retention and improve the qualifications and experience of staff.
- Operational management is good and ensures effective coordination between on- and off-the-job training. Assessments are well planned and recorded. Branch managers know well in advance when assessors will visit their branches

to visit learners. Many branch managers are ex-apprentices and have a good understanding of the apprenticeship programme. They use this knowledge to good effect in helping learners to progress.

- The approach of NTS to quality improvement and self-assessment is satisfactory. Staff are suitably consulted and contribute to self-assessment each year. NTS collects feedback from learners and branch managers to inform the self-assessment process and drive improvement. Progress towards improvement is monitored at training meetings and recorded on action plans but these are not always sufficiently well documented.
- Safeguarding practices are satisfactory. Health and safety is a clear priority in all branches and learners show a good understanding of safe working practices. NTS complies with government requirements concerning staff training and the registration of training staff with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). An appropriate central record is maintained.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. NTS has developed specific marketing materials in an attempt to reach under-represented groups but this has not yet had an appreciable impact on recruitment. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity.

What does National Tyre Service Limited need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve staff and learners' understanding of safeguarding practices through appropriate training and better communication of safeguarding procedures.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by providing further training and support to trainers, and revising the outcome from teaching and learning observations to provide more helpful judgments regarding the areas for improvement.
- Improve the effectiveness of reviews by ensuring long-term targets are challenging and clearly defined and that individual learning plans are better utilised to support learning. Develop the documentation to promote discussion on health and safety and equality and diversity.
- Improve learners' understanding of equality and diversity by more frequent reinforcement and testing. Record in more detail the level of learners' awareness. Develop staff skills to ensure that they are confident in discussing equality and diversity aspects with learners.
- Continue to improve overall success rates by more effective monitoring of learners' progress and the introduction of intermediate targets.
- Develop a more inclusive and evaluative self-assessment process involving all stakeholders by ensuring a broader range of views is considered including those of learners and branch managers. Include judgments on safeguarding and equality and diversity in the development plan.

- Improve the use of partnerships to widen participation by strengthening links with the local council, local education authority and other youth recruitment agencies which influence the choice of young people in career choice.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- learning a lot from the programme and improving their skills and knowledge
- the good focus on health and safety
- their regular contact with supportive assessors who give good feedback
- the very good support in the workplace from mentors
- their programmes which meet expectations and are well matched to the job
- gaining a better understanding of the job
- gaining increased confidence with customers
- the good opportunities to learn while being paid.

What learners would like to see improved:

- a training centre to be located closer to home.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the quality of the apprentices that the company recruits
- training is job related and improves the performance of the branches
- training is managed not to disrupt the workplace
- learners have increased confidence and skills and are better at dealing with customers
- training helps meet staff development needs and aspirations of apprentices
- the improvement in staff confidence, knowledge and understanding in branch operation.

What employers would like to see improved:

- a reduction in the amount of paperwork associated with the apprenticeship scheme
- more practical experience for learners while at training centres
- the organisation of assessment planning for key skills.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. The capacity of NTS to make and sustain improvements is good. NTS has made a number of key improvements since the previous inspection, including to the structure of its training provision, the introduction of a new quality improvement infrastructure and a revised review and assessment system to make it clearer to learners. The company has effectively managed the modest growth to its provision and has ambitious plans for further expansion of its training within its five-year strategic plan.
9. The self-assessment report is largely accurate and is used to improve the quality of provision. Both overall and timely success rates have risen and are at least comparable with national rates. Learner and employer feedback is collected, analysed and used to evaluate and improve the provision. Managers are aware of the company's development needs. Much work has been done recently to develop safeguarding and equality and diversity practices, though it is too early to judge the impact of this work.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. Outcomes for learners are good. Timely success rates for learners are high. The timely success rate over the last three years has been high and in 2008/09 was 71%, which is well above the national timely rate. During the same period overall apprenticeship success rates rose and are satisfactory. Learners based in the south west region have a much higher overall success rate of 100% and a very high timely success rate of 86%. Apprentices currently on programme are making good progress against their training plan targets. Retention rates at 95% are also high.
11. Apprentices enjoy their learning. They take pride in their portfolios, which contain a good range of work. Apprentices write clear notes to explain how their portfolio evidence demonstrates their competence and clearly cross-reference to the relevant standards. A wide range of assessment methods are used to build informative and well-structured portfolios which include good use of photographic evidence.
12. Apprentices develop good employability skills and increased confidence. They carry out a variety of practical tasks in the workplace to appropriate industry standards, under the supervision of qualified technicians. There are ample hand tools and a wide range of modern garage equipment which enable learners to develop good professional practice. Branch managers encourage and support learners in gaining good levels of occupational skills in fast-fit operations.

13. Apprentices have a good understanding and appreciation of health and safety. At induction learners receive a comprehensive introduction to safe working practices and this is reinforced throughout the apprentices' time with the company. Safety has a high priority at all sites. Many safety posters are prominently displayed. Learners do not operate machinery until they have received suitable training. Apprentices say that they feel safe, are well supported and free from harassment or bullying. They are aware of the wider support available through the company.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

14. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Off-the-job training is effectively planned. Staff plan each block of training thoroughly, assess each learner's performance and suitably record the results. However, some tutors use a limited range of training styles and do not take sufficient account of individual learners' needs. Branch managers are well informed about the training which takes place at the company's two training centres. Training resources are good and they contribute significantly to effective learning. Classrooms at both training centres are spacious, light and airy and contain an appropriate range of teaching aids. The company has recently invested in a computer suite, with a comprehensive range of hardware and software allowing learners to improve their information and communication technology (ICT) skills and undertake on-line assessments. Adjoining workshops are spacious and contain a range of workshop equipment similar to that found in branch depots. Staff who support learners in the training centres and in the workplace have considerable, relevant occupational experience.
15. Most branch mentors who are responsible for overseeing the apprentices training have worked for the company over an extended period of time. Some mentors have been NVQ candidates and have a particularly good knowledge of the process. Assessors hold appropriate qualifications. Staff who instruct learners at the training centres are occupationally competent and experienced but do not have formal teaching qualifications. Key skills are assessed at the training centres. While staff have worked hard to develop the key skills programme, little use is made of evidence from the workplace.
16. On-the-job training is good. Mentors and workplace supervisors give personal and occupational support a high priority. They skilfully question learners when they return to the branch to review their progress and arrange suitable related training tasks and work experience for learners. Mentors encourage apprentices to work towards company quality standards and support them in acquiring high levels of practical skills. Most mentors and supervisors have good knowledge of NVQs and assessment processes and effectively contribute and support learners. Apprentices respect the mentors and assessors and are very positive about the benefits of training. The induction programme has been appropriately updated to include material more relevant for young people. The content of the

training programme has been continuously reviewed to increase its relevance to apprentices.

17. Assessment and internal verification practices are satisfactory. Most assessors set measurable targets for learners' achievements, but some of the targets are imprecise and difficult to measure. Some staff do not use individual learning plans effectively. Internal verification practices follow awarding body procedures.
18. Learners' additional support needs are identified effectively during the selection process and in the early stages of their training. Formalised test arrangements are used to assess the use of grammar, punctuation and to assist in the recognition of dyslexia. The results of these assessments are recorded on individual learning plans. Where support needs are identified the company ensures that apprentices receive this quickly. The company has satisfactory arrangements in place for the accreditation of learners' prior achievements including key skill exemptions.
19. Apprentices receive very good support; this strength was identified in the company's self-assessment report. Pastoral support provided by mentors and other company staff is also good. All apprentices are allocated an experienced, trained mentor when they start the training programme. Branch managers and assessors are highly committed to training. Learners feel valued and well supported. The company rewards and celebrates learners' successes, holding annual ceremonies to celebrate the completion of the apprenticeship training programme. Apprentices' successes are widely promoted in the organisation and externally.
20. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Branch managers formally review learners' progress every 10 weeks and make appropriate contributions to discussions with visiting assessors to inform learners' progress. The review documentation focuses mainly on the apprenticeship programme and has few references to health and safety or equal opportunities. Target setting and action planning are underdeveloped. Review records focus on short-term outcomes, resulting in insufficient opportunities to stretch and challenge learners. The outcomes of reviews are not used sufficiently to update apprentices' individual training plans.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

21. Leadership and management are good. Strategic management at NTS is good. The board of directors has a clear commitment to training and development. The five year plan covering the period 2008–13 includes details of how the apprenticeship programme and other training will be expanded and its anticipated impact on the company, which has plans for an additional training centre. The apprenticeship programme is viewed as a key component in the drive to improve staff retention and improve the qualifications and experience of staff. The board and senior management are effective in creating financial accountability and have taken effective action to maintain the timely success

rate at a high level, improve overall success rates and ensure the programme builds the skills of trainees. However, they do not sufficiently monitor the quality improvement of the training provision or the variations in performance across different regions. The staff appraisal system is used well to identify further training needs for learners and staff.

22. Operational management of the training programme is good. Assessments are well planned and recorded. Branch managers know well in advance when assessors will visit learners in the workplace. Many branch managers are ex-apprentices and have a good understanding of the apprenticeship programme which they use to good effect in identifying tasks in the workplace to provide the necessary range of evidence. Assessors and human resources staff have very good working relationships with branch managers and mentors. Communications are good and branch managers are kept well informed about the training activities carried out in the training centres each month and about the progress of their apprentices. Links between on- and off-the-job training are good.
23. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Health and safety is a clear priority in all branches and learners show a good understanding of safe working practices. Regular audits of health and safety are scheduled and informal reviews of health and safety take place during visits by assessors or human resources staff. All staff who have regular contact with learners have recently received initial safeguarding awareness training. The designated responsible person has recently had additional safeguarding training to level 2. All training staff have been registered with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and an appropriate central record is maintained. Suitable risk assessments are in place for learners staying in hotels whilst attending the training centres. Learners and hotel managers have contact telephone numbers for key NTS staff in case of any incidents. Learners feel safe and believe that staff respond well to their welfare concerns. Safeguarding now has a greater priority and the company training course for workplace mentors is being redesigned to include more emphasis on safeguarding awareness and guidance on handling disclosure of abuse. The safeguarding policy is satisfactory.
24. Arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Learners receive satisfactory instruction in equality and diversity during their induction and this is followed up in the second year of their apprenticeship. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities and have access to the companies' equal opportunities policy, further policies on bullying and harassment, and the grievance procedure through the intranet and staff handbook. All learners understand how to make a complaint. Human resources staff have received training in equality and diversity and receive frequent updates on any changes to legislation. Updates are discussed at training team meetings to ensure that all staff are aware of developments in equality and diversity. There is no significant variation of performance by different groups of learners. NTS has specific marketing to reach under-represented groups but this has not yet had an appreciable impact on recruitment. All of the company's premises are accessible to wheelchair users.

Staff do not have sufficient strategies to reinforce effectively, or develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity during their course.

25. Self-assessment is largely accurate and is used to improve provision. Since the last inspection key improvements have been made in the quality control infrastructure and in the review documentation and processes. Significant changes have been made to the staffing structure and new procedures have been introduced for safeguarding. Staff are consulted effectively and contribute to the self-assessment each year. NTS collects feedback from learners and some branch managers to inform self-assessment. Progress towards improvement is monitored at training meetings and recorded on action plans but these are not always sufficiently well documented and actions are sometimes difficult to monitor across successive meetings. The self-assessment report does not give sufficient attention to safeguarding or identify the reinforcement of equality and diversity as a key area for development.

Information about the inspection

26. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Training and Safety Manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

National Tyre Service Limited

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	35				35
Part-time learners	0				0
Overall effectiveness	2				2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2				2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*					
Quality of provision	2				2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2				2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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