

# APCymru, trading as The Military Preparation College

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 58806

**Name of lead inspector:** Nicholas Crombie HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 13 July 2011

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** The Military Preparation College  
Unit 5  
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## Information about the provider

1. APCymru, trading as The Military Preparation College (MPC), was established in Wales in 1999. It subsequently operated as a subcontractor in England for the delivery of Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and assumed direct responsibility for the contract in 2008. In September 2010, MPC transferred from E2E to Foundation Learning. MPC's Welsh programmes are not in scope for this inspection.
2. MPC has a contract with the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for Foundation Learning programmes in England, through centres in Farnborough, Brighton, Eastbourne, Portsmouth and Southampton. In May 2010, MPC started additional YPLA-funded sports programmes in Southampton and Portsmouth. The YPLA contracts account for all MPC's activity in England.
3. The Foundation Learning programmes offered include literacy, numeracy at level 1 and information and communication technology (ICT) at Entry level 3. Just over 12% of current learners are qualified above level 1 in English and mathematics on entry, an increase of five percentage points from 2008/09.
4. MPC has a long-standing link with the armed services, particularly the army, and many of its staff are ex and serving military personnel. Around 30% of learners enter the armed services following completion of their course.
5. MPC works specifically with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In the south east of England, just under 6% of young people aged 16 to 18 are in the NEET category.
6. In England, the provider currently only provides training on its own account and at the time of inspection had no active subcontracting arrangements with other organisations in England.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<b>Provision for young learners:</b>	
Foundation Learning	101 full time learners <sup>1</sup>
Entry to Employment	9 full time learners

<sup>1</sup> MPC learners are required to attend full time five days per week. Foundation or E2E learners are otherwise typically part time.

## 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		2
Equality and diversity		2
Subject Areas		
Foundation Learning		2

## Overall effectiveness

7. MPC's overall effectiveness is good. In a number of aspects MPC provides an outstanding service to learners, including the extent to which learners improve their economic and social well-being, community links, the effectiveness of its care, guidance and support and its strong partnership with the military. However, high achievement and progression rates for E2E last year are offset by low achievement rates in the functional skills element of the Foundation Learning programme and low progression so far this year. Teaching and assessment practice in some centres is not up to the high standard in others. Some aspects of MPC's quality improvement arrangements require further development, notably its system for observing teaching and learning.
8. MPC demonstrates a very strong focus on meeting the overall needs of learners, and they develop well, but programmes are not always sufficiently tailored or flexible enough to maximise the progress that could be made by every learner. Target setting is not consistently specific or focused in all centres.
9. MPC's approach to translating a clearly articulated vision and set of core values into appropriate practice has been highly effective, and the vision and values are understood and embraced by all staff and learners. MPC has a very good system for monitoring individual learners' performance. Safeguarding

arrangements are very thorough, and the arrangements for promoting equality and diversity are good.

10. Learners' views are sought regularly and acted upon. Self-assessment is thorough but too positive in its tone and scope. Quality improvement action planning is sound.

## **Main findings**

- On the E2E programme learners' progression to training, education or employment and their achievement of learning goals has been high and improved over time. Attendance and retention are also high and improving, although attendance was variable during inspection. In functional skills, learners' achievements and progression are low this year, and achievement is expected to remain low for the full year.
- The MPC programme is a transformative and highly positive experience for many learners. They develop a high standard of self-discipline, team-working, social skills and self-esteem. They have a better understanding of their place in society and develop a clearer understanding of how to achieve their goals. Those who seek a career in the armed services in particular respect and work well within the boundaries of MPC's disciplined military environment.
- Learners feel very safe. MPC staff place a strong focus on health and safety. Thorough risk assessments are integral to all aspects of the programme. However, there is insufficient understanding by staff and learners of e-safety.
- The development of learners' fitness is outstanding. Daily physical training is well planned, includes a wide range of activities, and successfully supports most learners to achieve armed service fitness standards.
- MPC learners make an outstanding contribution to their local communities. Learners' involvement with local schools and charity events has raised significant amounts.
- Teaching, training and learning are generally good but some training staff are not as proficient in training and assessment as others. In some lessons training is delivered to a single standard and not sufficiently varied to take account of each learner's requirements. Target setting is not consistently specific, measurable, time based, or detailed to support the achievement of set goals in all centres.
- Although learners achieve well overall, programmes are not sufficiently individualised to ensure that every learner is able to achieve as much as they are able. Some repeat learning unnecessarily.
- MPC's partnership working is outstanding. It has particularly strong and productive links with the army. MPC's military and civilian staff are highly motivated and committed to developing and supporting learners' achievement and provide excellent pastoral support. Learners trust and respect MPC staff.
- MPC's management team is very strongly committed to providing a highly effective experience for learners. It has a clearly defined and very well thought

through strategy based on a series of core values which effectively shape and develop the provision. All staff share and practise MPC's values and vision.

- MPC has particularly well developed performance management and monitoring systems which track every aspect of each learner's journey. However, aspects of MPC's quality improvement arrangements are under developed. Its system for observing training and learning is not sufficiently rigorous.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough but there is no formal monitoring and recording of learners deemed at some form of risk.
- Staff and learners' awareness of equality and diversity is good, although not always covered in sufficient depth in learners' reviews. Training, promotion and delivery of equality and diversity within the curriculum are good. There has been a consistently low number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds on the programme.

### **What does MPC need to do to improve further?**

- Improve achievement and progression in functional skills through ensuring there are sufficient trained staff available and that the curriculum is further developed to match learners' needs.
- Support all tutors to develop and apply improved teaching and assessment skills, including the practice of differentiation and the use of a range of teaching styles, to enhance all learners' training and learning.
- Ensure that all teaching and training staff use assessment, diagnostics and target setting to further individualise programmes and fully inform learning plans for each learner.
- Develop and implement a structured and rigorously evaluative system for the observation of teaching and learning to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, and identify and disseminate good practice.
- Develop a formal monitoring and recording system for each learner deemed to be at some form of risk to ensure that any barriers to learning and progress are dealt with appropriately.
- Significantly develop staff and learners' awareness of online e-safety to ensure learners are sufficiently protected when on the internet.
- Devise and implement an effective strategy to attract and retain a significant number of learners from minority ethnic groupings.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- how MPC has changed their lives for the better
- the improvement in their fitness
- the college's help to get learners into the army, by helping them understand what is expected of them
- the activities and the comradeship

- the varied teaching with lots of energisers and different tasks which maintain interest
- how the staff are very supportive and never give up on helping them achieving their goals
- being asked for opinions on how the course can be improved
- how the course has significantly improved with the recruitment of new staff.

**What learners would like to see improved:**

- that some of the work is too easy
- a more challenging ICT course.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

**What employers like:**

- a well motivated team that enthuses the students.

**What employers would like to see improved:**

- no views offered.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 2**

11. MPC has a good capacity to make and sustain improvement. Learners' achievements on the E2E programme have improved over time and are now very high, although achievements in functional skills on the new Foundation Learning programme this year are low. Nevertheless, MPC's impact on most learners is positive and transformational, the result of a resolutely applied learner-focused approach to learners' development. Despite some generally good practice, there are inconsistencies in the quality of the teaching. The system for observing teaching and learning, while functional, requires further development. Target setting is not always sufficiently specific or time bound.
12. MPC has developed a very thorough approach to performance management and monitoring, and is particularly effective at tracking individual learners' progress. MPC's core values and clear vision translate demonstrably into the company's operational activity and strategic development. Staff embody the values in their behaviours and share the vision. They are strongly focused on supporting learners and transforming their lives. Quality improvement planning is detailed and identifies most of the aspects identified by inspectors. The underpinning self-assessment, while thorough, is insufficiently evaluative and tends too much towards highlighting the positive. The quality improvement action plan is used actively to monitor progress in continuously improving the provision, but is not sufficiently linked to self-assessment.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 2**

13. On the E2E programme in 2009/10, learners' progression to training, education or employment and their achievement of key objectives were very high, at 76% and 84% respectively, having improved over time. E2E learners' achievement of qualifications was also very high. However, in the year to date, learners' progression rate and their achievement of the core functional skills element of the Foundation Learning programme have been low. MPC estimates that functional skills achievements will remain low for the full year. The quality of learners' work in their literacy and numeracy folders does not always meet the standards learners are expected to achieve. There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female learners.
14. Learners' attendance and retention in 2009/10 were high and had improved, although attendance at the different centres was variable during inspection.
15. The MPC programme is a transformative and highly positive experience for many learners. Staff successfully focus on helping learners overcome challenging social and personal circumstances. Many learners speak openly of how their lives have been turned around and the positive effects attendance at MPC has brought.

16. Learners enjoy, and are very positive about, their learning, particularly the group activities. Their team working, communication, social skills and personal confidence and self-esteem generally improve significantly. They develop a better understanding of their place in society, have a clearer understanding of realistic employment goals and how to achieve them. Those who seek a career in the armed services in particular respect and work well within the boundaries of MPC's disciplined military environment, as do most learners.
17. The development in learners' fitness is outstanding. Physical training is undertaken daily, is adapted to individual capability, and covers a wide range of activities to build cardio-vascular, muscular and general physical fitness. Learners are tested twice monthly to assess how well they meet armed service fitness requirements. Learners develop a very good awareness of nutrition and a healthy lifestyle.
18. Learners feel very safe. MPC staff place a strong focus on health and safety. Thorough risk assessments are integral to all aspects of the programme. However, staff have insufficient understanding of e-safety, and do not promote it well enough to learners.
19. MPC learners make an outstanding contribution to the community. Learners' involvement with local schools is extensive and charity events have raised significant amounts. At one centre, learners' skills and awareness are extended very well through activities in a local care home, and working with adults with learning disabilities and difficulties.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

20. Teaching, training and learning are generally good. MPC has developed well thought out and detailed guidance for the content and quality of training delivery. Much of the teaching observed during inspection was stimulating, challenging, well planned and effectively structured. Praise and constructive feedback are used well. A high level of mutual respect is evident between learners and staff. Good use is made of short active learning activities, with a strong focus on reflecting on the learning that has taken place. Learners are required to practise their presentation and communication skills. However, in a few cases, training is delivered to a single standard and not sufficiently varied to take account of all learners' abilities or preferred learning styles. The quality of marking and feedback is mostly thorough but occasionally sparse. These inconsistencies have not been identified in MPC's observations of teaching and learning system which, while extensive, is not sufficiently structured or evaluative.
21. Initial and diagnostic assessment arrangements are comprehensive but do not include a dyslexia indicator for functional skills. While regular weekly support is given to one dyslexic learner, there are insufficient specialist resources available to aid all dyslexic learners.

22. MPC's partnership working is outstanding. MPC has particularly strong and productive links with the army which enhance learners' ability to meet the fitness standards required on entry to training, and understand military practice and military expectations.
23. The range of provision offered to learners is good. Learners with plans for a military career are particularly well provided for. However, the programmes are well suited to MPC's other learners who want a highly structured and active learning environment but do not want to join the armed services. Learners recognise that staff respect and value them as individuals, but nevertheless MPC's programmes are not sufficiently flexible or individualised to ensure that each learner is able to achieve the most they can. A few longer-term learners repeat learning unnecessarily, although they may undertake different topics in the process. Target setting in each centre is not always sufficiently specific, measurable, time based or detailed to support the achievement of set goals.
24. MPC promotes and practices very good recognition of success. An extensive awards and rewards system successfully encourages and motivates learners, and they value this system highly. Wall displays celebrate their achievements; medals are awarded for success in a range of activities. High profile awards ceremonies are held bi-annually.
25. MPC's care, support and guidance for learners are outstanding. Staff provide excellent pastoral support. They are highly motivated and committed to supporting learners' achievement. Learners trust and respect MPC staff.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

26. MPC's management team is very strongly committed to providing a highly effective experience for learners. Its vision and demanding core values are very clearly stated, understood and practised by all staff. It has a well defined and very well developed strategy, grounded in its core values, which successfully shapes and develops the provision. MPC has particularly well developed performance management and monitoring systems which track every aspect of each learner's journey. Extremely detailed training and guidance materials have been developed for staff, although not all staff are familiar with the detail.
27. Attendance at an annual week of staff training and development at an external location is mandatory. It is an exceptional initiative on the part of the College. The week is used particularly well to review progress, update training, discuss challenges, agree new strategies and renew team spirit. Staff find the week challenging and productive.
28. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and effective. The reporting structure is effective and well understood by staff. Disclosures and referrals have been handled appropriately. Staff training has been given a high priority and updates for all staff take place twice a year. A trained welfare officer is in place at each centre. However, while staff have a good knowledge of each learner's circumstances, there is no formal monitoring and recording of learners deemed

at some form of risk. There is currently insufficient awareness among staff or training arrangements to promote e-safety for young people.

29. MPC has good arrangements to promote equality and diversity and tackle discrimination. All policies have been reviewed and are up to date. All staff have received regular training and updates. A detailed equality and diversity action plan has been developed recently. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity is good, although the subjects are not always covered in sufficient depth in learners' reviews. The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching, learning and use of resources is good. Staff successfully challenge stereotypes and increase learners' understanding and awareness of disability. The percentage of learners from a minority ethnic background has been very low and is currently just below 2%. MPC's outreach activities to increase minority ethnic participation have been ineffective.
30. MPC has good arrangements to engage with users to support and promote improvement through quarterly learner forums and an annual learner questionnaire. MPC takes action in response to learner views.
31. MPC's quality improvement arrangements are extensive and well organised. However, the system for observing teaching and learning, while comprehensive in scope and practice, is not sufficiently evaluative or structured.
32. MPC offers outstanding value for money. It makes very good use of the resources available. E2E achievement and progression are very high. MPC provides training five days a week rather than the three for which it is contracted.

## **Information about the inspection**

33. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Director of Quality, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of MPC's most recent self-assessment report and development plans and data on learners and their achievement.
34. Inspectors visited each of MPC's sites in England. They used group and individual interviews to gain the views of learners. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence from the subject area that MPC offers.

# Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## The Military Preparation College

**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 <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b> Full-time learners	110	110
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2	
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
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?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	1	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1	
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
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?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1	
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
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?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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