



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1998

**Milton Keynes
Christian Foundation Ltd**

SUMMARY

Milton Keynes Christian Foundation Ltd (MKCF) provides training for young people with learning difficulties or social problems. The quality of training is good. Trainees are fully involved in the negotiation and review of individual training plans. Programmes are adapted to meet the learning needs of each trainee. Their attendance is high, with 62 per cent completing training. Trainees are extremely well supported throughout their training. Relationships between staff and trainees are good. MKCF assures equality of opportunity for its trainees. The quality of trainees' progress reports is particularly high. Quality assurance and management procedures are effective.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good trainee involvement in setting and reviewing learning objectives
- ◆ flexible programme delivery ensures that training meets individual needs
- ◆ training facilities fully accessible to trainees with disabilities
- ◆ comprehensive support for trainees throughout their programme
- ◆ high standard of trainees' review reports
- ◆ effective staff appraisal procedures linked to staff development programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor on-site provision for information technology
- ◆ quality assurance procedures focus on systems, rather than quality of training
- ◆ inadequate administrative support for training staff

INTRODUCTION

1. Milton Keynes Christian Foundation Ltd is a registered charity established in 1972 by an association of local churches. The company is involved in community projects and work to promote local economic development, funded through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). Since its formation, MKCF has been a provider of training. Its training is funded mainly through contracts with Milton Keynes & North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Foundation training programmes are offered to young people (mostly in the 15 to 25 age group) who are struggling with, or failing to participate in, mainstream further education or youth programmes, or who cannot find employment because they have no training. All trainees are referred to MKCF by the careers service, which carries out initial assessments on the trainees and identifies each as having additional training needs. MKCF is contracted to train around 50 people a year. The programmes are 26 weeks long.

2. MKCF offers two distinct training programmes: extended training, a scheme for disillusioned year 11 pupils from local schools, and initial training, a programme of basic skills training for up to 20 disadvantaged young people. The extended training scheme is funded and operated in partnership with local schools, the local education authority and the educational welfare service. The aims of the initial training programme are to enable trainees to develop basic skills, acquire life skills and social skills and to develop disciplined and positive attitudes towards training and employment. Trainees are helped to develop confidence and self-worth and to identify goals and objectives for the next phase of their life.

3. Trainees work towards nationally recognised qualifications awarded by the Associated Examination Board (AEB). Qualifications include literacy and numeracy at levels 1, 2 and 3; basic skills; life skills; world of work. MKCF has recently received accreditation from the Awards Scheme Development & Accreditation Network (ASDAN) as a key skills centre. Training in key skills is an integral element of the programmes.

4. The TEC area of Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire has a population of 240,000. It is a prosperous area, with unemployment currently at 2.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 4.6 per cent, though Milton Keynes has pockets of deprivation. Minority ethnic groups make up 6 per cent of the population. Locally, 246 young people are eligible for youth programmes. Of these, 68 are seeking programme places. The proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grades A* to C is 35 per cent in Milton Keynes, compared with the national average of 53 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. MKCF produced its first self-assessment report in May 1998. The report, which focuses on the needs and experiences of trainees, was prepared jointly by the director of training and all full-time staff involved in the delivery of training. The self-assessment process has initiated improvements in management procedures and in the delivery of training. The report identifies action-plans to consolidate strengths and address weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the report. However, the company failed to recognise some strengths and weaknesses in all aspects of its provision. Generally, the company understated the quality of its provision. Inspectors awarded each aspect of provision a higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

6. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at MKCF during June 1998. They interviewed all 10 trainees on the initial training programmes and seven trainees who had completed their training. Meetings were held with the director of training and with all staff managing and delivering training. Inspectors observed four training sessions and one assessment session. They visited off-site training venues and 'work taster' placements. They also examined trainees' personal files, individual training plans and work portfolios; schemes of work; records of attendance and progress; data on students' achievements; staff curricula vitae; documents relating to management, quality assurance, equal opportunities, appraisal and staff development.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 2

7. Nearly all trainees on the initial training programme underachieved at school and have learning difficulties. Many also have emotional, social and personal difficulties. Training is aimed at developing personal skills and improving self-esteem, as well as enabling trainees to achieve qualifications in basic skills. Training is delivered over four days each week. Most of it takes place at the company's centre, with some off-site provision for computing and art, sports activities and work-taster placements with local employers. Programmes are delivered flexibly, and trainers work closely as a team to accommodate the changing needs of the individual or group. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report, but identified further strengths. They awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and well-documented review of training procedures

- ◆ effective trainee involvement in setting and reviewing learning objectives
- ◆ good provision for trainees' self-assessment
- ◆ high-quality training
- ◆ training delivered flexibly in response to individual trainees' needs
- ◆ good attendance at training sessions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor information technology resources at the training centre
- ◆ inadequate range and variety of work-taster opportunities

8. Trainees' progress and achievements are recorded systematically and monitored effectively. Trainees' files are updated weekly and used as working documents to review and revise learning objectives. Trainees are fully involved in the initial planning of their training programmes and the identification of their training needs. They engage in a process of continual self-assessment, evaluating their progress and negotiating achievement targets. During the training programme, trainees attend four formal review sessions with trainers, who also provide informal feedback to trainees on a daily basis. Trainees' files include their own views on the quality of training.

9. MKCF provides specific training opportunities for pregnant trainees. During the last three years, about 25 per cent of female trainees were expectant mothers. Programmes include sessions which help these trainees to prepare for childbirth and parenthood. Part of the training centre had been developed as a community centre and is used as a crèche and playgroup. The community resource is used effectively to develop the social skills of trainees and to encourage them to participate in community activities. The crèche, for example, provides trainees with valuable experience of working with small children.

10. Trainees' attendance is closely monitored – reasons are sought for unexplained absences. The average level of attendance is 94 per cent. Levels of achievement are satisfactory: 50 per cent of trainees have progressed to employment or to further training over the last three years. In 1997-98, 62 per cent of trainees successfully completed their training programme and 51 per cent achieved qualifications. Relationships between trainers and trainees are good and are based on mutual respect. Training staff work hard to engage and sustain trainees' interest and motivation, and they make a substantial contribution to the levels of achievement which trainees reach. Staff are well qualified and appropriately experienced.

11. On-site resources for information technology are poor. Centre-based computing facilities are insufficient for key skills training and for the development and use of teaching resources which encourage and enable students to work on their own. Programmes include an optional computing session, delivered off site on one afternoon each week, at which trainees are given the opportunity to use modern equipment, such as digital cameras and scanners, to produce high-quality project work. Accommodation used for the management and delivery of training is of a high quality. Teaching rooms and offices have recently been refurbished, and they provide a pleasant and spacious environment conducive to learning. Social and

recreational facilities for staff and trainees are good.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

12. MKCF has an equal opportunities policy which meets legal and contractual requirements. Equal opportunities procedures are inherent within the quality assurance framework of the company. The staff understand and support the policy on equal opportunities. MKCF has an open-access policy, under which it accepts all trainees, regardless of learning ability. The effectiveness of equal opportunities procedures has been introduced as a standing item on agendas for staff meetings. The self-assessment report failed to identify all the strengths and weaknesses of this aspect of provision, and the company generally undervalued its performance. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ discussion of equal opportunities issues in training programmes
- ◆ help and support for trainees with housing difficulties
- ◆ full access to training facilities for trainees with disabilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate promotion of equal opportunities in marketing materials
- ◆ weak procedures for assuring equal opportunity in work-taster placements

13. There is inadequate promotion of the company's equal opportunities policy. The marketing literature for training programmes fails to include reference to equal opportunities. Equal opportunities in the recruitment of trainees is monitored against local statistics. Information relating to gender, ethnicity and disability is systematically collected and evaluated. The company recruits an equal number of male and female trainees, and 12 per cent of trainees are registered as disabled. Four per cent of trainees are from ethnic minority groups, which is only slightly less than the proportion of those from minority ethnic groups within the local community. Procedures for assuring equality of opportunity in work placements are inadequate. A copy of the equal opportunities statement is attached to all providers' agreement forms, but MKCF relies on placement providers to implement their own equal opportunities policies.

14. Equal opportunities issues are discussed as part of the trainees' induction programmes, and issues such as bullying and racial discrimination form an integral part of the social skills programme. Discussions have raised trainees' awareness, understanding and support of equal opportunities issues. The induction package, given to all new trainees, includes a copy of the equal opportunities policy. The

GOOD PRACTICE

The company carried out an exercise to evaluate the housing status of its trainees. Analysis of the sample revealed that 55 per cent of its trainees had problems with accommodation, and further research showed that housing problems were a major contributory factor in trainees' failure to complete their training successfully. MKCF has undertaken a £350,000 building project, with 50 per cent of funding from a local housing association, to provide hostel accommodation for 19 trainees close to the training centre.

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equal opportunities statement uses contemporary phrases and words which are meaningful to the trainees. Grievance procedures for trainees are clear – trainees understand them. The company aims to address complaints within a week. MKCF has sought to extend the equality of opportunity in training to trainees who have housing difficulties. It is undertaking a major project to provide hostel accommodation for those trainees who need it. Training and social facilities on the company's premises are at ground-floor level and are fully accessible to wheelchair users. A lift is available for first-floor access. The centre has good lavatory facilities for disabled people.

Trainee support

Grade 1

15. Prospective trainees are invited to attend the centre before starting their training, to assess the suitability of programmes. New trainees are given initial assessments, using diagnostic tests for literacy and numeracy. Results of testing, together with assessments made at interview, are used to negotiate individual training plans with identified learning goals. Trainees are given an induction programme. Procedures for support are well documented and form an integral part of training programmes. Trainees are well supported in their training. They also receive help and advice on personal and social problems from staff and, where necessary, from specialist support workers belonging to outside organisations. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report, but felt that the strengths had been understated.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good comprehensive support for trainees
- ◆ effective procedures for identifying trainees' needs
- ◆ strong culture of mutual support among trainees
- ◆ effective use of outside agencies to provide specialist learning support
- ◆ high standard of trainee review reports
- ◆ good provision for personal counselling
- ◆ good careers advice and information on further training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inspectors identified no significant weaknesses

16. Low staff-to-trainee ratio enables staff to deliver programmes which meet the trainees' needs and provide a high level of personal support. Each trainee is allocated to a trainer who is responsible for her/his support, though all members of staff also provide support, as appropriate. Relationships between staff and trainees are strong and are based on mutual respect. The ability of staff to provide effective learning support and pastoral support is a significant factor in enabling trainees to

complete their programmes successfully. During the training programme, trainees attend four formal review meetings with trainers to discuss and evaluate their progress. A fifth review meeting is held on completion of the training to appraise the training and to provide trainees with information and advice on progress to further training or employment. A fortnightly meeting for trainees and staff is used to encourage trainees to raise matters of interest or concern, to share experiences and to learn from one another. These meetings have helped to develop a culture of mutual support among the trainees. Outside agencies and organisations provide effective specialist support for trainees with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and personal counselling for trainees experiencing emotional difficulties or social problems.

17. Induction programmes for trainees are well planned and effectively delivered. Trainees sign learning agreements which clearly state their rights and responsibilities. New trainees are closely monitored during an initial four-week probationary period, at the end of which the first of the review sessions is held. At these reviews, there is a thorough evaluation of trainees' progress. Reports are written for each trainee. These are comprehensive, detailed and of a high quality. They are subsequently used by trainers and trainees in negotiating individual training plans. Trainees' personal files provide accurate, up-to-date information on all aspects of training and support.

Management of training

Grade 2

18. Management is co-ordinated by a full-time director of MKCF who devotes a quarter of his time to the training activities of the organisation. Three full-time staff are responsible for the delivery, management and administration of the initial training programme. A part-time trainer delivers literacy and numeracy support one day a week, and off-site training in computing and art is delivered by part-time staff. The extended training programme is co-ordinated by a fourth full-time trainer. Management procedures are documented within the quality assurance manual, and procedures reflect good practice in maintaining equality of opportunity. There is an induction programme for all new staff. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report. However, the report failed to identify some major strengths in the management of training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and efficient deployment of staff
- ◆ full involvement of staff in the development of policies and procedures
- ◆ good relationships with outside organisations
- ◆ effective staff appraisal procedures linked to staff development programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate administrative support for training staff

- ◆ discrepancy between management procedures for initial and extended programmes

19. Staff have job descriptions and fully understand their responsibilities. They are effectively and efficiently deployed in roles which are appropriate to their qualifications and experience. All full-time staff manage and deliver training programmes. Communication between staff is good, although information is not always imparted effectively to part-time staff. Meetings for full-time staff are held on a monthly basis to debate training and management issues and to formulate policy decisions. Information on recruitment and trainees' achievement is collected and evaluated on a regular basis and used to inform management strategies. There is not enough administrative support for staff. Routine administration duties add to trainers' daily workloads and have a negative impact on staff morale. The extended programme provides training for year 10 and 11 pupils who are disillusioned with school. Differences exist in management procedures for this programme and management procedures for the initial training course. The apparent lack of reason for these differences creates intermittent tensions among both staff and trainees.

20. The company has formed good relations with outside organisations. MKCF is involved in the Wolverton Partnership, funded by the SRB, which seeks to promote economic development in the community. The company has a well-established and effective framework, linking staff appraisal and staff development. Staff meet every six weeks with the director as part of the appraisal process, and self-appraisal forms are completed on an annual basis. Individual staff development needs are identified as part of the appraisal process. The company has a budget for staff training. Training programmes satisfy the needs of both individuals and the company.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

21. MKCF has a clear and well-documented quality assurance system which meets the contractual requirements of the CCTE. The company also meets the requirements of its awarding bodies. Procedures for quality assurance developed by the staff team are subject to regular review and revision. The company has not sought to achieve any external quality standards. Some strengths identified in the self-assessment report relate to contract compliance. Some of the identified weaknesses were minor. Inspectors identified further strengths and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ implementation of effective action-plans to address weaknesses
- ◆ improvements in management procedures arising from self-assessment
- ◆ regular reviews of performance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ procedures focus on systems, rather than the quality of training

22. The quality assurance framework is comprehensive, but focuses on the effectiveness of systems, rather than on the quality of trainees' learning experiences. Staff meetings provide an effective means for the review and evaluation of performance. There are detailed minutes and action-plans, including the dates by which actions are to be completed and the name of the staff responsible for initiating the actions and monitoring progress. The self-assessment process is integral to the quality assurance framework. Methods for gathering trainees' views on the quality of training are largely informal. The company relies on daily feedback from trainees to staff. Procedures for collecting information for programme evaluation are being implemented, but have yet to lead to rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of training. Contractual arrangements relating to trainees' achievement of learning goals have been reviewed and amended this year. Audits of levels of achievement are conducted by the CCTE. These audits, used by MKCF as performance indicators, have succeeded in motivating training staff and they have led to improvements in the quality of training.