



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1998

Mobile Care Qualifications Limited

SUMMARY

Mobile Care Qualifications in Newcastle is a specialist care training provider. Training provision is good, with careful links made between learning and skills developed at work. Off-the-job training sessions are of a high quality and are delivered competently, using a good range of resources. The key skills units are covered late in the programme. Trainees' contact with staff is frequent, and there are regular opportunities for candidates to discuss their progress and obtain help, if needed. The company is well managed, but does lack long-term strategic direction. The company has a new quality assurance policy and set of procedures which are not yet firmly established. Internal verification systems do not work with consistent vigour

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent programme management
- ◆ good-quality off-the-job training sessions
- ◆ good career progression
- ◆ rigorous assessment procedures
- ◆ equal access to assessment for all candidates
- ◆ good individual guidance and support
- ◆ effective working relationships with employers

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late introduction of key skills
- ◆ variable internal verification practice
- ◆ lack of action-planning to further promote equality
- ◆ lack of rigour in initial assessment procedures
- ◆ insufficient business-planning
- ◆ quality assurance procedures not yet fully established

INTRODUCTION

1. Mobile Care Qualifications Limited (MCQ) was formed in 1994. It specialises in the care sector. It also delivers training in management and in training and development. Much of this provision is part of the company's non-government-funded commercial activities. MCQ is based in Newcastle in northeast England. It contracts with Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to deliver training in health, care and public services. At the time of inspection, there were 114 modern apprentices and eight staff members. Apprentices are employed by 69 local care establishments, including provision for childcare and care of the elderly. These include both private and local authority organisations. There are also 12 trainees with the company under the New Deal programme, but these were excluded from the scope of inspection. The company subcontracts a small amount of specialist health and safety training to a local consultant. Off-the-job training is delivered at two sites, in addition to the company's office in Newcastle. These are in Tynemouth, approximately nine miles to the north, and South Shields, which is eight miles south of Newcastle.

2. There are 835,000 people living in the Tyneside region, of whom 100,000 are in the modern apprentice age group. The unemployment rate in the area is 7.8 per cent - higher than the national average of 5.2 per cent. Unemployment for those aged 16 to 24 is extremely high at 22.2 per cent on Tyneside compared with 13.6 per cent nationally. A recent economic assessment produced by Tyneside TEC predicts a rise in employment in the care for the elderly sector, which is one of the largest employment sectors in the region. Future trends predict an increase in the number of part-time jobs and more flexible working patterns. The care sector is notoriously low paid. As a result, staff frequently move from job to job to improve their salary. Throughout the region, only 34.5 per cent of the workforce is qualified to NVQ level 3 or equivalent.

3. The number of school leavers in Newcastle achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above is low at 31 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent for 1998. Less than 1 per cent of the population is from a minority ethnic group.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The managing director and company secretary led the self-assessment process. They attended TEC training sessions and held weekly staff meetings to work through the self-assessment process. Trainees and employers' feedback was gathered using a questionnaire, and the responses were used to help to make judgements. The level of response from employers was high, at 75 per cent.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 11 days at MCQ in December 1998. They interviewed 25 trainees and eight employers. They observed one formal training session (awarded a grade 2) and two assessments. They conducted 10 staff interviews (some staff being interviewed on more than one occasion). Inspectors also examined a wide range of documents, including trainees' files and portfolios of assessment evidence, verifiers' reports, training session plans and the company's quality assurance manual and procedures.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

6. There are 110 modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in care. All candidates are employed in one of the 65 local nursing and residential homes, with which the company works. Each care home has at least one qualified work-based assessor, and some have an internal verifier. Apprentices are invited to attend regular training days to develop their understanding of the relevant theory, held at three different sites. In addition, there are weekly drop-in sessions for trainees requiring information or guidance. All assessment is done in the workplace. There are also four modern apprentices on the NVQ early years care and education programme, working towards the level 3 award. These apprentices are employed in three local nurseries and a crèche. Staff are qualified and experienced in the care sector and hold appropriate NVQ assessor and internal verifier awards. In addition, they hold, or are working towards, teaching and training qualifications. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent programme co-ordination
- ◆ well-motivated candidates
- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training sessions
- ◆ good learning resources at work

- ◆ good career progression
- ◆ rigorous assessment procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late introduction of key skills

7. There is excellent programme co-ordination by MCQ's staff, ensuring that both work-based training and assessment and off-the-job training fit together well. There is frequent contact among MCQ staff and workplace assessors and supervisors to monitor each aspect of the programme. Employers ensure that candidates are given the opportunity to carry out tasks at work related to the units of competence selected. There is good integration of practical and theory work. Candidates are highly motivated and eager to progress with their awards. They initiate and plan their assessment, setting themselves challenging targets which they meet. There is a high level of individual support from MCQ's staff. The programme is designed to be flexible. There are three venues for the off-the-job training sessions, for candidates' convenience. The off-the-job-training programme is a menu of sessions from which candidates can select their needs and preferences. If they miss a particular session at their nearest venue, they can attend at a later date at one of the other two centres. These sessions are of a high quality. They are well planned and delivered competently, using a rich variety of training methods and resources. Internal verifiers are invited to monthly meetings at MCQ, but attendance is poor. There is variation in the way in which internal verification is carried out and a lack of clarity about the rôle of the internal verifier. Candidates provide evidence for their key skills units through carrying out a project, after they have completed their level 3 award in care. This lack of integration of the key skills into the vocational programme is recognised by the company, and it is now developing resources to help them to deliver key skills more effectively.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

8. MCQ has an equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of its awarding bodies and the TEC. The company does no direct recruitment of apprentices, they are all referred by employers. The company collects data on candidates' age, gender, ethnicity and disability. There are 10 male trainees out of the total of 114. Two per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The self-assessment report did not successfully identify the strengths or weaknesses for this aspect. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ equal access to assessment is ensured for all candidates
- ◆ promotional literature and training materials depict positive images of under-represented groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of action-planning to promote equality
- ◆ failure to apply equal opportunities policy to staff

9. MCQ's equal opportunities policy clearly states the commitment of the company to ensuring that all trainees, irrespective of their shift working patterns, will have equal access to assessment. The company promotes this practice and ensures that night workers are not disadvantaged. This is monitored through regular contact with trainees and employers. Action is taken to meet any digression from the policy. MCQ collects data on candidates' age, gender, ethnicity and disability, but does not analyse the information or draw up action plans to recruit trainees from under-represented groups. However, the company has carried out a survey on reasons for the low uptake of training by those from the Asian community. Training materials incorporate the values of multicultural care. MCQ does little advertising or promotion of its services, other than through personal contacts and word of mouth. The company has not addressed the overall management of equality of opportunity, which is not applied to activities such as staff recruitment and staffing procedures. Most the staff recruited are through direct referrals. The company's equal opportunities policy does not specify relevant legislation on gender, race and disabilities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

10. All apprentices are employed and have an induction programme with MCQ which covers health and safety, equal opportunities, guidance on the NVQ process, portfolio-building and the appeals procedure. They receive an information pack to reinforce the programme's content. In order to address of poor retention and achievement, MCQ introduced a new system of giving applicants one month's trial period to complete one unit of the award. At the end of the month, the unit is assessed and a skills check document completed. This helps MCQ to assess trainees' suitability for the programme and to identify any additional support needs. Trainees' progress is formally reviewed quarterly, and there are additional monthly visits from the internal verifier. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company, and identified further strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong commitment to trainees' personal support needs
- ◆ workplace staff motivate trainees to achieve
- ◆ good learning support
- ◆ frequent and effective progress reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in initial assessment procedures
- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of key skills

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee was afraid to take up training, owing to her fears of reading and writing. MCQ's staff reassured her and encouraged her to start level 2 in direct care. She has received high levels of additional support to cope with her learning difficulties. She is now nearing completion and has chosen units for level 3 and is confident to pursue her career.

11. Staff know trainees well and are committed to providing both learning and personal support. There are examples of staff providing continued guidance and support for trainees who have temporarily left the programme for personal reasons. Staff are well qualified to give the support, with one member of staff holding a counselling qualification and a certificate in supporting those learners with additional learning needs. Two trainees with specific learning difficulties are getting additional help, and have almost completed their award, despite under-achieving at school. Arrangements have been made for these candidates to record verbal evidence, rather than produce written work. The centre offers drop-in sessions each week, in addition to off-the-job training sessions, so that trainees can get individual help and use the centre's resources. Where there are difficulties in trainees getting to training centres, staff provide transport. Employers work effectively as a team with MCQ's staff and motivate trainees well. Each verifier is responsible for his or her own group of care homes. The visits serve several purposes: to monitor progress, to set targets, to update assessors and carry out internal verification of any completed units and to give feedback to the candidate and assessor.

12. The procedure for carrying out initial assessment of candidates after the one-month trial period is good, but the way in which it is administered is superficial. There is no consultation with employers, and assessment of basic skills is not rigorous. The procedure does not include systematic assessment of trainees' competence in key skills.

Management of training

Grade 3

13. MCQ is a small company with eight staff. There is a managing director, a company secretary, five training staff and an administrator. Two of the training staff have been recruited in the last six months, as the company had recognised the need to strengthen the team. Rôles in the company have evolved to accommodate staffing changes. Job descriptions are general in nature, as each individual holds several rôles in the organisation. There is a staff appraisal scheme, and an annual training plan is produced. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good management of both on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ effective strategy to overcome an early leaver problem
- ◆ effective working relationships with employers and external agencies
- ◆ good internal communication

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped staff performance management system
- ◆ no short- or medium-term objectives
- ◆ insufficient strategic planning

14. The company has effective links with employers and works hard to maintain and develop these further. Employers' staff, not on the modern apprenticeship programme, are invited to participate in training sessions. These working relationships and the frequent contact enable the company to manage all aspects of the training effectively, both on and off the job. There is careful integration of these two aspects of the programme, and the links between the award and workplace tasks are evident to trainees. Managers have effectively tackled the problem of early programme leavers, which previously threatened the achievement of TEC targets. Investigations into the cause of the problem showed that initial assessment was ineffective in ensuring that applicants were suitable for, and capable of undertaking, the programme. Action was taken to extend and improve the initial assessment procedure, and the results are being monitored closely. Initial findings are positive, with none of the 18 candidates, joining under the new regime, leaving the programme.

15. The staff appraisal scheme is undeveloped and not applied throughout the organisation. The two managers are not appraised, and the appraisals for two further staff members are overdue. The newly recruited staff have received an induction, but there are no arrangements to review or give feedback on their performance. The company's training plan is not the result of systematic analysis of company and individual needs. It is based on an informal view of training needs and how best they can be met. For example, all training staff are embarking on the certificate in education award to develop training skills. However, alternative programmes of study have not been fully considered or explored. The company has begun to formulate a business plan, but it is currently incomplete. While the overall mission statement of the company is clear and supported by all staff, short- and medium-term company objectives have not been set. The company is well managed at an operational, everyday level, but lacks strategic planning and direction.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

16. MCQ obtained external accreditation for its quality assurance system through the ISO 9001 quality standard in July 1998. The company is committed to reviewing the system each year. There is a policy and set of procedures to cover many of the company's key activities. The company's quality assurance arrangements meet the requirements of Tyneside TEC. The company did not identify any strengths or weaknesses for this aspect through self-assessment. Inspectors identified some strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade awarded by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ feedback from trainees and employers is sought and used effectively
- ◆ comprehensive policy and procedures
- ◆ achievement and trainees' destination data are used effectively

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistently followed internal verification procedures
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements are not extended to subcontractors

17. The quality assurance policy and related set of procedures are comprehensive and cover the company's key activities. Some procedures have not yet been followed, owing to the newness of the system. Feedback from trainees and employers is regularly obtained through questionnaires and verbal feedback during review visits. This is carefully analysed and used to improve the quality of provision. An example of such improvements is the feedback received about the unsuitability of a venue used for practical training sessions in first aid and manual handling. The company has also introduced the delivery of off-the-job training sessions in the workplace, as a result of the feedback obtained. These sessions are delivered at a time convenient for trainees and employers. There is careful analysis of achievement and trainees' destination data. Information on the destination of programme leavers is used to track candidates from one employer to another, encouraging them to rejoin their apprenticeship programme with their new employer.

18. Staff are not yet fully familiar with the procedures, and the quality assurance arrangements have not yet been successfully communicated to employers. In particular, the procedure for internal verification is not applied consistently, with individuals' working practices not being monitored or co-ordinated.