



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

REINSPECTION MARCH 2000

Comcare

SUMMARY

Comcare offers satisfactory training in care, and the quality of workplaces is high. Although staff and trainees are aware of equal opportunities issues, the company does not actively promote equal opportunities. Trainees are well supported throughout the training programme. At the time of the first inspection, management of training and quality assurance arrangements were less than satisfactory. Much of the communication between staff is still informal but the procedures to ensure effective management of training have been improved. The arrangements for quality assurance have improved and are continuing to develop. Quality assurance arrangements now include effective feedback systems. Management of training is now satisfactory.

As a result of the reinspection of Comcare, the original published report text for management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training
- ◆ wide range of good-quality placements
- ◆ high level of trainee support
- ◆ good support for work-based assessors

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ management and quality assurance systems not fully established
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills
- ◆ poor awareness of programme requirements among trainees

INTRODUCTION

1. The original owner of Comcare (formed in 1984) ran a residential care home and, when difficulties were encountered in recruiting trained staff, approached the Manpower Services Commission about training staff. The Comcare Consortium was formed, comprising a group of 35 members of the Isle of Wight Care Home Owners Association which started to train young people under the Government's Youth Training Scheme. This training progressed to residential domiciliary and day-care courses and then to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). A new owner took over Comcare in 1997. In January 1998, the company moved to new premises, which includes office space and a training room. The company employs one full- and two part-time members of staff. There has been expansion recently, and two new internal verifiers have been appointed but have not yet started work.

2. Comcare has a contract with the Wight Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to offer training in care. At the time of the first inspection, there were 53 people training, including 29 modern apprentices, 11 national trainees, 11 on other youth training programmes, and two on adult programmes. There are now 64 trainees, including 34 modern apprentices, 27 national trainees and three other youth trainees.

3. The Isle of Wight is a small, but varied island, one mile from the coast of mainland Britain. It covers 146.8 square miles, and 54 per cent of islanders live in rural areas. The population is 124,000; 99.2 per cent are white and 0.8 per cent of other ethnic origins. Those aged below 16 form 17.9 per cent of the population, and 22.5 per cent are over 65 years. The Isle of Wight suffers from high seasonal unemployment patterns, consistently above the Southeast and United Kingdom average. In September 1998, 6.1 per cent of the population was unemployed, compared with 2.8 per cent for the Southeast and the national average of 5.1 per cent. This figure rises during the winter season. It is estimated that there are 6,200 self-employed people working as sole traders without any employees. Characteristically, businesses are small- and medium-sized enterprises operating locally within a limited industrial base. Seventy-five per cent of local businesses rely on the internal island market, 25 per cent concentrate their business on the mainland, and 10 per cent compete internationally. Twelve companies employ 200 plus workers, with most (92 per cent) employing fewer than 25, and 78 per cent employing up to 10 employees. Employment is concentrated around a few industries: approximately three-quarters of the workforce are employed within tourism, retail, public administration and manufacturing.

4. The percentage of the workforce qualified to a NVQ level 3 or above is 52.6, with 28 per cent qualified to NVQ level 4 or above. This is above the national average, and, if the growth rate is maintained, the island will reach its qualifications target in 2000. Young people tend to do well at school, but have limited opportunities afterwards. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above



was 44.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Those aged 15 to 29 tend to leave for the mainland as soon as they have finished formal education, although some do return after obtaining qualifications. As a result, there is significant net outward migration in this age range, while all other age groups exhibit net inward migration.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The owner of Comcare, in consultation with the training staff, completed the first self-assessment report in September 1998. The report did not clearly identify strengths and weaknesses. It included actions to be taken to remedy weaknesses, but did not identify staff's responsibilities or target dates for completion. For the reinspection, the company produced a comprehensive action plan showing details of the action taken and the progress made towards achieving the objectives. The company is in the process of producing a second self-assessment report to be sent to Wight TEC by May. The company has a realistic view of its achievements since the first inspection and inspectors agreed with the grades given.

6. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at Comcare Training Services in October 1998. Inspection covered the modern apprenticeship, national traineeship and other youth training programmes. Because of the small number of adult trainees, adult training programmes were not inspected. Inspectors examined management files, trainees' achievement data, trainees' personal files and portfolios. Meetings were held with company staff, assessors, employers and trainees. Inspectors visited 15 companies, interviewed four employers, five work-based assessors and 18 trainees. Six review sessions were observed.

7. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors over a total of six days in March 2000. Inspectors interviewed 10 trainees and five employers and observed three review sessions. Inspectors examined documents relating to trainees, including assessment records, management and quality assurance documents.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

8. Comcare offers NVQs in care at levels 2 to 4 through national traineeships, modern apprenticeships, other youth training programmes, and for those who pay for their own training. Most trainees are employed. The company also offers training for staff in care homes who wish to qualify as assessors. Work placements are provided by the 32 privately owned care establishments which make up the Comcare Consortium. Many of the larger care establishments provide training and develop programmes for all established staff using NVQ awards as part of their planning for staff progression. There are 53 trainees, of whom 29 are modern apprentices, 11 national trainees, 11 other youth trainees and two adult trainees. Comcare has three staff, two of whom provide trainee support and assessment services. The staff are experienced and well qualified, supporting the development of work-based assessors. Inspectors identified an equal number of strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-planned and -resourced training
- ◆ trainees influence assessment
- ◆ some trainees are well motivated

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some ineffectively managed trainee progress
- ◆ some trainees have poor understanding of their programme
- ◆ ineffective implementation of key skills

9. Comcare has, over a period of years, developed placement opportunities which provide trainees with a wide range of choice as to the type of care setting within which they wish to work. Trainees with particular needs are offered placements in establishments which are able to support their personal and learning needs. Most placements used are of a good standard, support trainees' achievement and provide substantial levels of workplace training which directly contributes to their progress. Most placements have qualified work-based assessors who have considerable occupational experience and are able to provide trainees with a good-quality assessment service. Comcare assesses trainees' skills and prior achievement on entry to their programmes and has a well-designed training programme to develop trainees' theoretical knowledge. The training venue is good which, together with structured training and the opportunity to meet with Comcare assessment staff, encourages regular trainee attendance at sessions and contributes to their progression. Trainees are encouraged to participate in planning assessment activity, and many develop a high level of control over the assessment process leading to sensible progress towards qualification. This also enhances trainees' progression, as it enables them to plan the integration of off-the-job training given by the placement provider, with the assessment process. Some trainees are highly motivated and this is encouraged by Comcare and work-based assessors as a means of improving trainees' achievement rates and progression to higher-level NVQs.

10. Some trainees are not encouraged to make sufficiently rapid progress as a result of a lack of effective management of the assessment process. Some modern apprentices and national trainees are not set demanding targets for their NVQ level 2 qualifications and consequently have to meet unrealistic progress targets for the achievement of the required key skills and level 3 qualifications. Most of these trainees have a very limited understanding of the type of programme which they are following, its requirements and the assessment process. This results in assessment opportunities being lost and consequent inhibition of progress and achievement. Assessors, generally, do not make sufficient use of direct observation as an assessment method and have a very poor understanding of key skills requirements. The company has plans for the assessment of key skills, but these have not yet been implemented and current trainee progress is being adversely affected by the lack of assessor knowledge of key skills and any clear integration of key skills in the assessment process.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

11. Comcare has an equal opportunities policy which meets legal requirements and commits the company to providing training without discrimination or racism. All trainees are issued with a candidate's charter which aims to guarantee equality of opportunity. The company requires all placement providers to have an equal opportunities policy which is reviewed on an annual basis. Statistical data are collected about trainees' gender, age and disability status, however, data on trainees' ethnicity are not collected. Comcare serves a community with a significantly lower proportion of those from minority ethnic groups (0.8 per cent) than the national average. Inspectors found an equal number of strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainee recruitment challenges traditional rôle models
- ◆ individual staff energetically promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ good support for trainees facing discrimination

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities among trainees
- ◆ training venue not accessible to those with mobility difficulties
- ◆ data not analysed to inform decision making and improvements

12. The company has strong links with local schools and is invited to attend open events, such as careers evenings, where trainees are frequently recruited. Comcare recognises that there is traditionally a gender imbalance in the recruitment of care staff and provides opportunities for male trainees to develop careers in the care sector. Seventeen per cent of care trainees are male, and these trainees receive encouragement and support in achieving their career objectives. Comcare's staff demonstrate a personal commitment to equality of opportunity and provide substantial support to the 10 per cent of trainees identified as having learning difficulties. The support given to trainees includes the provision of equipment for use in the home, to promote progress and achievement, and individual training, where required. Comcare provides substantial support to trainees who are not given time for off-the-job training and takes active measures to ensure their access to training and qualification opportunities. This enables trainees who have experienced discrimination on placement to agree about strategies with Comcare to overcome the discrimination.

13. Most trainees have a poor understanding of the company's equal opportunities policy and the implementation of equal opportunities in a care environment. Few trainees are aware of their right to appeal against assessment decisions, and there is

little understanding of the company's complaint and grievance procedures. Recruitment of training staff is mostly through personal contact and word of mouth, inhibiting opportunities to recruit a diverse staff group and not addressing the current gender imbalance of the staff, currently all women. While individuals in the company have a strong commitment to equality of opportunity, the company does not use the available management-information systems to monitor the progress, achievement or destination of trainees. The company does not have documented action-plans to promote or manage equal opportunities. The company's training venue is not accessible to trainees with mobility difficulties.

Trainee support

Grade 2

14. Comcare has two staff carrying out internal verification and peripatetic assessment duties, both responsible for the provision of trainee support. Individual work-based assessors also provide support for their trainees. It is the company's aim to have a trained work-based assessor in every work placement and when contracting with new workplace providers, training is offered. Comcare has an information leaflet detailing its training services for potential trainees. Trainees are referred for training by the careers office and by employers. General enquiries are also made by telephone to Comcare's office. Comcare assesses trainees' skills, knowledge and prior achievement on entry to their training programme and, using this information, develops an individual training plan for each trainee. The support staff also note additional support needs at this stage. Comcare gives trainees an induction to the training programme and a handbook during the first week. Further training then follows in health and safety, first aid, back care and food hygiene. Comcare staff visit all trainees on a quarterly basis to monitor progress and provide advice and support. Trainees are able to contact Comcare's staff by telephone, and additional visits/meetings are arranged as required. Comcare provides advice on further training and employment opportunities at these meetings. Basic documents, showing the support offered, are in trainees' files. The trainees' handbook has been reviewed recently and is now issued in a revised form. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good analysis of prior achievements at initial assessment and throughout programme
- ◆ substantial support for trainees with diverse needs
- ◆ trainees receive effective personal counselling and support
- ◆ trainees complete self-assessment forms

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding by trainees of their rights and responsibilities
- ◆ ineffective initial induction for many trainees

15. Comcare's staff assess prior achievements at initial interview, using the National Record of Achievement (NRA) and also the results of an assessment carried out by the careers service. Prior achievements are used effectively in establishing induction and training requirements. Trainees' GNVQ qualifications are cross-referenced to the NVQs' requirements. This has enabled several trainees to make quick progress on their programme. Comcare provides support for trainees with diverse learning needs, including those suffering from dyslexia, hearing and emotional problems. Comcare's staff regularly contact trainees, at training sessions, through visits and by telephone, when they discuss progress, provide helpful advice and encouragement. Comcare's staff and work-based assessors also provide individual counselling and advice to trainees, in an effort to build their confidence, establish trust and help them to progress. Several trainees achieve successes beyond initial expectations. Care NVQ level 2 trainees complete a self-assessment form which includes timekeeping, team-working and punctuality. The assessor evaluates the same areas and the results are compared and discussed with the trainees at the quarterly meeting. The outcome of the meeting is to evaluate progress and familiarise trainees with the realities of work.

16. Some trainees have limited knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. In particular, they are unaware of the appeals, grievance and disciplinary procedures. In some cases, trainees are unaware of their status on the programme. Initial trainee induction to the programme is not effective, as many trainees are unable to recall the general issues from induction. In particular, key skills are not adequately addressed. As a result, trainees are unaware of the full requirements for completing their programme.

Management of training

Grade 3

17. Comcare is a small training provider specialising in providing care training for trainees working in residential, day-care and nursing homes. Since the first inspection, the company has recruited two new members of staff. The management structure remains simple, with the responsibility for day-to-day operational issues resting with the owner, who is supported by an internal verifier co-ordinator. There are policies covering all the activities of the organisation. The staff have company-wide targets based on the company's TEC contract.

The main weaknesses identified at the first inspection were:

- ◆ immature staffing systems
- ◆ no planned staff development programme
- ◆ no analysis of data
- ◆ no strategic business plan

18. Management of training has improved. The company has held a number of staff meetings to discuss ways of formalising the systems, and the corrective action taken by the company has addressed the weaknesses identified during the first

inspection. Using its management information system, the company can now collect achievement and retention data. It also records the reasons why trainees leave the programme early. The data are discussed at staff meetings and remedial action is taken including, if necessary, the way in which training is carried out.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high number of work-based assessors available to trainees
- ◆ good management information systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some management systems not established
- ◆ lack of key skills training

19. Comcare has developed a clear business plan to be updated annually which provides a structure and focus for the operation of the company and its staff. The company has a staff appraisal and development system to increase the skills of assessors and internal verifiers. Each member of staff has a development plan. Staff training needs resulting from appraisal are now being addressed. The management-information system gives easy access to information on trainees, including achievement and retention rates. The data are analysed and used in decision-making.

20. Comcare has developed its strong links with employers since the first inspection. Some employers now act as tutors on Comcare's training programme which helps them develop a thorough understanding of the NVQ requirements and means that the training is based on current practice. On- and off-the-job training is well integrated. Comcare also makes use of its good links with employers to help individual trainees to negotiate any additional personal support required and to allow trainees additional time during working hours to complete their portfolios.

21. One of Comcare's business objectives is to use work-based assessors wherever possible. The company recruits these assessors from a wide range of care establishments which increases the opportunities for trainees to use naturally occurring evidence. Over 95 per cent of trainees have work-based assessors, while the remainder are assessed by Comcare's staff who visit trainees on average every three weeks. The company works closely with the careers service and with schools to promote training opportunities to young people. Such training may include a wide range of care settings, including the care of older people, those with learning difficulties and nursing home care.

22. The company has developed a wide range of policies and procedures in recent months. Some policies are too new for their effectiveness to be evaluated, while others, such as the company's recruitment and selection policies, are untested. The approach being taken to recruitment is based on personal contacts rather than open competition. This method of recruitment does not comply with principles identified

in the newly developed policy on recruitment and selection, or with good practice in relation to equal opportunities.

23. At the time of the first inspection, some assessors had a very poor understanding of key skills. However, they now have a good understanding of key skills and the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. The company has recognised the need to make arrangements for key skills training. A small number of trainees have already achieved their NVQs and have not completed the modern apprentice framework, because they have not yet achieved information technology and application of number key skills. However, new trainees are now able to complete the necessary key skills.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

24. Comcare now has written quality assurance policies and procedures which are contained in a manual available to all staff. Quality assurance arrangements are the responsibility of the owner of the company. Policies and procedures are available to all staff. The procedures have an issue date and second date to indicate when they should be reviewed. The company meets the requirements of the TEC contract. There has been a review of quality assurance systems and all the weaknesses identified in the first inspection have been addressed.

The main weaknesses identified at the first inspection were:

- ◆ incomplete and excessively informal quality procedures
- ◆ trainees not consulted about the effectiveness of training and assessment
- ◆ new internal verification system not yet proven

25. The internal verification system is now established, and in addition, an internal verification co-ordinator has been appointed to oversee the work of the other verifiers. Some new systems are not yet fully established. Overall, there has been good progress and the area is now satisfactory.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ quality assurance arrangements result in continuous improvement
- ◆ effective feedback systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance systems not fully established
- ◆ lack of awareness of external quality standards

26. A number of quality assurance mechanisms has been introduced, including a monthly progress report on trainees, and whether their progress is excellent, steady

or poor. This list is given to assessors, who make a written comment and recommend any necessary action. The comments are read by the managers who make checks against targets and discuss issues as they arise. Since this system was introduced, the number of trainees achieving a qualification has increased and the number of early leavers has dropped from 24 in 1997/98 to 10 in 1998/99.

27. There are effective feedback systems covering both trainees and the employers. Employers are invited to give informal verbal feedback to assessors during their regular frequent visits to trainees. Employers are also sent a questionnaire once a year, which they can complete anonymously. Trainees are asked to complete questionnaires three times a year, the first one being distributed approximately eight weeks after their induction, the second midway through the programme, and the third one on completion of the qualification. The questionnaires are all analysed and action is taken, if applicable, on the suggestions made by either employers or trainees. An example of such action is the introduction of two new training sessions, one on mental infirmity, and the other on learning difficulties, to enable staff to meet the needs of trainees coming onto the programme.

28. Staff are aware and have a good understanding of the purpose and use of documents relating to quality assurance. Many new procedures have been written including a new system for dealing with complaints. Only one complaint has so far been received and addressed using the new policy, and it is too early to determine its long-term effectiveness.

29. Staff are not fully aware of all the general requirements for assessment and verification as set down by external bodies. For example, decisions made by an internal verifier who is working towards the relevant qualification are not countersigned by a qualified internal verifier.

30. Prior to the reinspection, the company produced an action plan which clearly showed how it had addressed the weaknesses from the first inspection and the progress made to date. The company gave grades for the areas being reinspected. The grades were considered to be accurate by inspectors.