

Quality and Standards in Training in Wales

Inspection Report

Educ 8 – Phoenix Training

March 2004



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
For Education and Training in Wales

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- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ adult and community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ LEA's;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ work-based training;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ the education, careers and training elements of new deal.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

This report is one of a series on the quality and standards of training in Wales.

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Summary

The quality of training provided by Phoenix Training is good. Overall training is well planned and there are good relationships between trainees and assessors. The high level of support offered by assessors and the use of an electronic, paper-free system for gathering evidence, enable trainees to complete their workplace portfolios in a relatively short period of time. However plans for workshop activities do not always clearly identify learning objectives and assessment methods. Trainees are given regular written feedback, but the comments on trainees' progress are not always evaluative enough. The standards achieved by trainees are good and training outcomes are reasonable.

Overall, there is good planning and management of training. There is effective integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training and good communication between trainees, assessors and employers. Occasionally, feedback to employers and supervisors does not reach all relevant personnel. The fortnightly workshops and key skills sessions at the start of the programme enable trainees to develop necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them well for external tests. Regular team meetings are used well to discuss the progress of trainees and to monitor progress towards overall targets.

All trainees are very positive about the level of support they receive. The induction programme is informative and all trainees are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. The results of initial assessment for literacy and numeracy are not systematically fed back to trainees and some trainees found the assessment daunting on their first day. There is a robust system for monitoring equal opportunities. There are regular planned opportunities for trainees to review their work with assessors. Trainees are encouraged to write their own evaluation.

All staff have appropriate qualifications and relevant experience for their job roles. Staff expertise is well used to support trainees. The work of the company has expanded rapidly in the last two years and peripatetic assessors are currently operating at full capacity. Staff training and development are given a high priority. The accommodation for training is spacious, comfortable and well-equipped, but the small library and space for quiet study are not used enough by trainees. Overall resources for training and assessment are good.

There is regular and close monitoring of training outcomes and progress towards targets. The company has developed an effective range of tools to take account of customers' views. The sampling by managers of each group of trainees' work provides further monitoring and helps to measure the effectiveness of quality systems. At present, the outcomes of evaluation activities are not rationalised into a single document that reflects the performance of the company over the contract year. Monthly standardisation meetings for assessors provide useful staff development and ensure the consistency and quality of assessment practice. Trainees' eight weekly reviews are well documented and evaluative, although in a small minority of cases they are not available in trainees' records.

Grade profile

Occupational area	Grade awarded
Health, Care and Public Services	3

Generic aspects	Grade awarded
Planning and managing training	2
Equality of opportunity and support for trainees	2
Resources for training	2
Management of quality	2

Introduction

1. Phoenix Training is currently part of the larger organisation of C.C.A. Residential Homes Ltd. There are plans for Phoenix Training to separate from the parent company in the coming year. C.C.A. Residential Homes Ltd provides residential care for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities and began training its own staff in 1996.
2. Since 1996, Phoenix Training has grown and now delivers private training across Wales at NVQ level 4, as well as providing Assembly funded training throughout south east Wales. The company currently offers training at NVQ levels 2 to 4.
3. The Phoenix Training team has specific expertise in residential care for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities and this is its primary area of training. A particular feature of the training is the innovative electronic paper-free system for gathering evidence in the workplace for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).
4. The team has all worked for C.C.A. Residential Homes Ltd and most have managed residential homes within the company.

Occupational area: Health, Care and Public Services

5. At the time of inspection, there were fifty-nine trainees on Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, seventeen trainees on the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA) and five trainees on Foundation Modern Apprenticeships. The company was delivering training at NVQ level 4 Registered Managers' Award, NVQ level 3 Promoting Independence and NVQ level 2 in Care.
6. As part of the level 2 and 3 programmes, trainees work towards the three core skills and the other key skills of Improving Own learning and Performance and Working with Others. Level 3 trainees also undertake the Technical Certificate and MSDA trainees take two additional management units.

Number of trainees	Advanced Modern Apprenticeship	Foundation Modern Apprenticeship	Modern Skills Diploma for Adults	Work-Based Learning for Adults
Health, Care and Public Services	59	5	17	

**Element 1:
The quality of training, learning and assessment**

Grade	2
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The quality of training and learning

7. The quality of training and learning is good. Workshops for the technical certificate at NVQ levels 3 and 4 are well planned, with clear links between learning activities and the underpinning knowledge required for units of the NVQ. However, learning objectives and assessment methods are not always clearly identified. Learning objectives for key skills are clear and planning is thorough. Trainees have a good understanding of their training and what is expected of them. Workshops are used well to plan technical certificate assignments and identify evidence in the workplace. Trainees particularly enjoy the group discussions. These enable them to explore, for example, the Human Rights Act and the concept of diversity. A good range of methods and materials is used to stimulate discussion and develop understanding, such as videos, task sheets, presentations and group exercises.

8. Trainees benefit from the exceptional level of support and commitment offered by assessors. Relationships between assessors and trainees are good. Assessors set challenging but realistic targets for trainees. The discrete sessions for the core key skills in the first half of their training programme develop trainees' underpinning skills for maths and information technology (IT). This prepares them well for the subsequent tests. The key skill of communication is fully integrated into technical certificate workshops where trainees make presentations to their colleagues and receive feedback from each other. This provides evidence for portfolios and develops trainees' confidence in speaking to wider audiences. However, the trainees' assessment summary sheet is not formally signed off before returning to the key skills tutor. The company provides key skills testing on-line and trainees benefit from being able to practice test papers on-line in the morning and sit the tests in the afternoon. Results are available in twenty-four hours.
9. The system is successful in enabling trainees to complete their portfolios in a realistic, but relatively short, period of time. Assessors provide good support and encourage trainees to use every opportunity to develop their portfolio on disc using photographs, video recordings and taped discussion. Trainees' written work is also scanned onto the disc. This is particularly useful for those who do not have regular access to a computer at home or in work. By using these methods, assessors support trainees to complete NVQ units steadily and consistently.

The quality of assessment

10. Assessment practice meets awarding body requirements and external verifiers' reports are good. NVQ assessment is fully documented on laptop computers and this records trainees' progress in all aspects of their training. All learning activities and meetings with assessors are recorded on feedback sheets and agreed by both parties. However, not all feedback includes a clear evaluation of learners' progress.
11. Reviews are carried out at regular intervals and clearly identify trainees' progress. Training plans are updated and have measurable targets. Trainees contribute well to the review process and the majority of employers are also present to provide feedback.

**Element 2:
Standards achieved by trainees**

Grade	3
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Achievement

12. Standards achieved by trainees are good. They develop occupational knowledge and competence appropriate to their levels of training. Overall, their portfolios demonstrate good levels of understanding, presentation and written skills. In a short period of time they develop confidence in using the computer and produce key skills projects using a range of packages required at NVQ level 2. This is despite the fact that some trainees' have not previously used a computer in work. Whilst all trainees are encouraged to carry out individual research, those on the MSDA programme do not make enough use of source materials other than those provided by assessors to further extend their understanding.
13. Many trainees have gained promotion within their employment as a result of completing their training. Employers comment positively on the achievements and progress of their candidates. For a significant number of trainees, this is the first time they have attended formal accredited training since leaving school. Trainees find the training challenging, but are extremely pleased with what they have achieved.

Attainment

Leavers / completers April 2003 – March 2004									
	New Starters during this period	Total Leavers this period	Leavers gaining full NVQ award	Leavers gaining full NVQ and 3 or more key skills	Leavers gaining part NVQ of 6 or more units	Leavers gaining part NVQ of between 1 and 5 units	Leavers without gaining a qualification		
							Related employment	Other employment	Unemployed
AMA	69	28	11	8			9		
FMA	4	1		1					
MSDA	20	10		6			4		

Key: AMA - Advanced Modern Apprentices, FMA – Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, MSDA – Modern Skills Diploma for Adults

14. Overall outcomes for 2003-2004 are adequate. In the year 2002–2003 outcomes were very good. The introduction of the Technical Certificate in the current year is having a significant impact on the rate at which trainees complete their full framework. All qualified leavers in the current year have gained at least the full NVQ and the majority have gained the full framework, which includes five key skills. Those leaving with no qualifications have left within the initial assessment period, several due to poor attendance. All trainees are employed.

15. The original time scale for framework completion was nine months. This has been revised to twelve months and all trainees currently on the programme are on target to complete their full frameworks within this time. The remaining starters originally due to complete in March are now completing in June. They represent 40% of the total starters for the year. Of this group, half have completed or almost completed their NVQ and taken the technical certificate exam. Three quarters are on target to complete their key skills by May.

Main findings

Overall grade	3
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16. The quality of training in Health, Care and Public Services is good. Trainees benefit from a well-planned training programme and very good support from assessors who set them challenging but realistic targets. They are able to use the electronic system to progress more quickly through their NVQ. Training outcomes are adequate.

Good features:

- the exceptional level of commitment and support offered by assessors;
- the innovative electronic system which enables trainees to complete their NVQ in a relatively short period of time;
- the challenging but realistic targets set for trainees; and
- the achievements of trainees, particularly those returning to formal learning later in life.

Recommendations:

- (1) ensure that learning objectives and assessment methods are made clear for all training;
- (2) encourage trainees on the MSDA programme to research more widely to further extend their knowledge and understanding;
- (3) ensure that all written feedback contains evaluative comments on trainees' progress; and
- (4) improve the rate at which trainees complete their full framework.

Generic aspects

Element 3: Planning and managing training

Grade	2
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17. Overall there is good planning and management of training, which meets the needs of trainees, employers and awarding bodies. The company's business plans identify clear objectives for training and specify overall targets for trainees' outcomes. There are appropriate policies in place to inform planning and support staff in ensuring that trainees develop to their full potential. This includes for example, policies on equal opportunities, recruitment, selection and reviews.
18. Trainees are given clear information about their training programme at induction. There is good communication between assessors, trainees and employers. Monthly reports to employers keep them regularly informed of trainees' progress and attendance. Occasionally this information does not reach all relevant personnel responsible for a trainee. Employers' contributions to trainees' reviews are good.
19. Individual trainees' progress is discussed at fortnightly team meetings. Quality issues, policy development and progress towards overall targets are also regular agenda items. Action points identify people responsible, but completion dates are not always identified and action points are not systematically reviewed at the start of the next meeting.
20. There is effective integration of off-the-job and on-the-job training. Monthly records of all contacts with trainees help assessors monitor individual progress and ensure that their time is being used effectively.
21. Schedules are drawn up for each group of trainees, which specify the learning to be covered in fortnightly workshops for the Technical Certificate and key skills. These include target dates for the submission of work. The workshops are delivered in the first half of the training programme and then trainees move onto the NVQ and other key skills in the second half of the programme. This structure enables trainees to progress quickly through the NVQ.
22. In the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA), trainees are fully involved in planning. Planning sheets are used well to identify evidence and assessment opportunities and dates for review of every NVQ unit.

23. During 2003 the company experienced difficulties in introducing the technical certificate for NVQ level 2 and 3 programmes. This is affecting about half of the starters for 2003–2004 and has slowed down the rate at which trainees complete their frameworks. The company has recently revised its time spans for framework completion from nine months to twelve months, although trainees have always been able to extend their programme if needed. All trainees are offered one to one support if required and may benefit from individual key skills tuition.

Good features:

- the use of team meetings to regularly monitor trainees' progress and review targets;
- the communication between assessors, trainees and employers that ensures trainees are well supported;
- the structure of level 2 and 3 programmes, which include dedicated sessions for key skills and the technical certificate; and
- the trainees' use of unit planning sheets at level 4 to identify evidence and set review dates.

Recommendations:

- (1) ensure that feedback on trainees' progress and attendance reaches all personnel responsible for a trainee;
- (2) make sure that action points from team meetings are time specific and reviewed at the next meeting; and
- (3) monitor the implementation of the framework completion and review at an appropriate stage.

**Element 4:
Equality of opportunity and support for trainees**

Grade	2
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Equality of opportunity

24. The company has developed effective policies to ensure that trainees have access to equal opportunities. These cover aspects such as recruitment and selection, support for those trainees with special assessment requirements and a whistle-blowing policy. Regular sampling of each training cohort, using questionnaires and one to one interviews, provides a robust system for monitoring the company's equal opportunities policy.
25. The equal opportunities policy is included in the induction booklet for trainees and is discussed along with other important information at induction. All trainees are asked to sign to confirm that they understand their entitlements and responsibilities. The booklet also provides detailed information on different aspects of their training programme including assessment methods, workshops and confidentiality.

Support

26. Trainees describe the induction process as useful and appreciate the friendly, supportive approach of assessors. This helps them settle in quickly. Planned group activities, early on in their programme, encourage collaborative learning. Trainees undergo an individual interview at the start of their training and in the majority of cases prior experience and achievement are taken into account.
27. All trainees are in employment and the majority register on the NVQ level 3 course Promoting Independence or the NVQ level 4 Registered Managers' Award. An appropriate initial assessment tool is used for literacy and numeracy and the results are given to assessors. However, there are no guidelines for interpreting the results nor are the results systematically fed back to trainees. Trainee feedback indicates that some found the assessment daunting on their first day.
28. All trainees are very positive about the level of support they receive and many make arrangements for extra one to one sessions with their assessors. Arrangements are made by assessors to meet trainees outside the workplace if this is more convenient.
29. There are regular planned opportunities for trainees to review their work and progress with assessors. These meetings are recorded on a feedback sheet on which they are encouraged to write their own evaluation.

Good features:

- the ready access to one to one support when trainees require it;
- the arrangements for assessors to meet trainees at times and venues that suit them;
- the use of facilitation and good practice days to help trainees settle in and inform them of their rights and responsibilities;
- the regular reviews and monitoring of trainees' progress; and
- the monitoring of the effectiveness of the company's equal opportunities policy using questionnaires.

Recommendations:

- (1) review the way in which the initial assessment for literacy and numeracy is delivered to trainees;
- (2) make sure that all assessors are able to interpret the outcomes of these assessments to better plan for additional trainee support where needed; and
- (3) make sure that the prior experience and achievements of all trainees are considered in the initial assessment period.

**Element 5:
Resources for training**

Grade	2
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Staffing

30. The training arm of the company has expanded rapidly over the last two years and trainee numbers have more than doubled. The company has responded by appointing new staff as required. The team of peripatetic assessors is currently operating at full capacity and there is further growth planned in the short to medium term.
31. Staff have appropriate qualifications and relevant experience for their job roles. Staff expertise is used well to support trainees working in residential homes for adult with learning difficulties and disabilities. A high priority is given to staff development and training. There are regular opportunities for staff to attend training events and training information is circulated at team meetings. Assessors benefit from attending monthly standardisation meetings where they discuss assessment practice, quality issues and programme development.

32. At present there are three staff qualified to deliver first aid. Whilst the company does not currently provide training in the medium of Welsh, trainees can be assessed in Welsh.
33. Staff training needs are identified through annual staff development reviews. Staff find their bi-monthly supervision meetings with managers helpful in being able to raise concerns and receive support. A detailed training matrix is derived from the development reviews, which links with the company's business planning and strategic objectives.

Accommodation

34. The recent move to new premises has resolved previous difficulties of lack of space. The new accommodation is spacious, comfortable and well-equipped. There is no disabled access to the first floor, but all necessary facilities for trainees are available on the ground floor, which is accessible. There is a small computer suite and all computers are networked with access to the internet. There is a room on the first floor for quiet study and a library, though this is not well used by trainees at present.
35. All staff are undertaking health and safety training and all work placements are vetted. Vetting procedures are carefully monitored by designated staff in the company.

Resources

36. Overall resources for training and assessment are good. There is a library containing relevant and up to date texts and journals. However, there are not enough copies of key texts for group use. There are good paper-based resources for key skills but not enough variety, for example, specialist software to allow trainees to work more independently in the IT suite.
37. All rooms are fully equipped for training purposes and all assessors are issued with laptops to support the paper-free system. All assessors have access to Dictaphones, digital cameras and video cameras.

Good features:

- the high priority given to staff development and training;
- the quality of accommodation at the new town centre site, particularly the well-equipped training rooms;
- the regular supervision meetings; and
- the monthly standardisation meetings.

Recommendations:

- (1) make sure that staff numbers and workload are reviewed regularly in the light of the company's planned expansion;
- (2) increase the amount and range of learning materials available to trainees; and
- (3) encourage trainees to make better use of the library and study area.

**Element 6:
Management of quality**

Grade	2
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38. There is regular and close monitoring of training outcomes and progress against targets. All assessors are required to report on individual trainees' progress at fortnightly team meetings. This is supported by the use of helpful, standardised checklists and bar charts which make it easy to track the progress of different groups of trainees and individual trainees.
39. The company has developed a useful and effective range of tools to take account of the views of customers. All trainees and employers are asked to complete an evaluation in the middle and at the end of training. The induction programme is also evaluated. Managers also sample trainees' records and carry out at least one equal opportunities interview with each trainee intake. All findings are summarised and fed back at team meetings, though these are not always recorded. This information is not currently used to produce an evaluative document that reflects the performance of the company over the contract year.
40. The progress of trainees is central to the monthly standardisation meetings. The standardisation meetings are chaired by one of the two internal verifiers and are attended by external assessors as well as the in-house assessor team. There is very useful discussion and participants are asked to bring samples of evidence or 'difficult' NVQ units are discussed in detail to agree the evidence requirements.
41. There is a very robust internal verification system, which is well-managed. Internal verification reports are detailed and offer assessors firm guidance as well as constructive feedback.
42. Trainees' records are well organised and up to date. The eight-weekly reviews are evaluative and usually include feedback from the employer. However, a small minority of reviews are not recorded in trainees' records. Training plans have clear and measurable targets.

Good features:

- the regular and close monitoring of training outcomes;
- the range of methods used to gather feedback from trainees, supervisors and employers;
- the internal verification system; and
- the sampling used to monitor equal opportunities.

Recommendations:

- (1) ensure that all review documents are kept with the trainees' records; and
- (2) develop a format for bringing together all evaluation results into a single evaluative document that informs annual planning.

Training provider's response to the report

We wish to proclaim our appreciation to the inspection team for the professional manner in which they conducted our inspection. The subsequent inspection report established recommendations that are constructive and valuable to the continuous improvement of our organisation. We therefore agree with the recommendations made and feel these will benefit our organisation.

Within the report, it was refreshing to note the inspectors were open minded with regards to the innovative 'paper free' system used by the organisation. Also pleasing to see was the recognition of the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff team and their positive relationships with the trainees.

The self-assessment process has enabled the organisation to critically analyse our overall performance and has enabled us to implement an ongoing development plan in support of the findings. On reflection, the Estyn inspection has proved to be an invaluable experience.

All members of the staff team at Phoenix Training have gained valuable knowledge in participating in this process.