



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

**MACTAC**  
(Merseyside Accredited Childcare  
Training & Assessment Centre)

## SUMMARY

MACTAC provides outstanding training in childcare. Off-the-job training is well planned and delivered and achievement rates are high. Provision for equality of opportunity, trainee support and management of training are good. Equal opportunities are well integrated into the training programme; there is good induction and good communication with, and information given to, placement providers. The arrangements for assuring quality are satisfactory.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	1

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent achievement rates
- ◆ trainees from disadvantaged groups encouraged
- ◆ equal opportunities well integrated with training
- ◆ thorough induction process
- ◆ specialist services available for trainees with additional needs
- ◆ good placement provider information
- ◆ well co-ordinated on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ comprehensive and detailed quality assurance policy and procedures

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little formal monitoring and review of equal opportunities
- ◆ individual training plan not used as a working document
- ◆ informal meetings not recorded
- ◆ lack of effective internal auditing and action plans

## INTRODUCTION

1. Merseyside Accredited Childcare Training and Assessment Centre (MACTAC) is part of Vauxhall Neighbourhood Council (VNC). VNC is an umbrella organisation and registered charity that aims to 'relieve hardship, improve education, preserve good health, promote employment opportunities and to provide an asset in the provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare and recreation of the community'. MACTAC, as part of VNC, is situated in the Vauxhall area of Liverpool, north of the city. MACTAC was established in 1994, initially in response to the need identified through the *Children Act 1989*, which stipulated that registered childcare facilities require 50 per cent of their staff to be suitably qualified. Situated above and linked to the VNC day nursery, MACTAC gained a small contract with Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to train local people from the Vauxhall community in national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in childcare and education. MACTAC has now grown to offer training and assessment in basic skills, key skills, and NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in early years care and education, playwork and customer services. It is an approved centre for two awarding bodies. MACTAC has a staffing compliment of nine full- and eight part-time staff; the management team comprises a centre manager, operations manager and course co-ordinator. MACTAC has a contract with the TEC for the New Deal, full-time education and training option. It is also a subcontracted training provider for the voluntary sector option of New Deal in Sefton. In addition, MACTAC offers programmes funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and Single Regeneration Budgets (SRB). Its main government-funded programme is delivered through a work-based training for adults contract.

2. Vauxhall is an area with severe unemployment and high levels of poverty and deprivation. The area has lost population over recent years, yet retains poor housing, poor physical environment and inadequate social and community facilities. The unemployment rates for Liverpool stand at 14.6 per cent for men and 4.4 per cent for women (Merseyside TEC, Key statistics, February 1999). The unemployment rate for the Vauxhall area is currently 25.2 per cent for men and 7.8 per cent for women, compared with the figures for the UK, which stand at 6.4 per cent for men and 2.4 per cent for women (Merseyside Employment Service, May 1999). Recently the area has become the focus of regeneration with the award of the Single Regeneration Budget funding to North Liverpool Partnership, the allocation of 'Pathways' resources under Objective One Programme for Merseyside and of 'URBAN' resources from the European Commission. VNC received funding from these sources to develop its new 'millennium centre'. The centre is due for completion in September 1999. Some areas of the building are already complete and MACTAC is based in the new purpose-built training centre, which forms part of the millennium complex.

3. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 30.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The minority ethnic population aged between 0 and 24 years, in the Vauxhall area is 1.8 per cent. The



figure for the whole of Liverpool is 5.6 per cent. (Merseyside TEC, based on 1991 census information). The percentage of trainees' attending MACTAC from minority ethnic groups has been, on average, 5 per cent over the past three years.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. MACTAC produced its first self-assessment report in February 1999. The information given was appropriate to the training provided. It gave good background information, although many of the strengths and weaknesses were different from those identified through inspection. The self-assessment process was inclusive of all staff, and taken forward by key staff members. Self-assessment has been a standing item on the agenda of staff meetings since June 1998 and fully discussed at all levels.

5. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at MACTAC in Liverpool. They interviewed 22 trainees, visited eight work placements and interviewed eight placement/workplace supervisors. They conducted seven interviews with administrative, training and management staff and interviewed the chief executive and chairperson of Vauxhall Neighbourhood Council. They examined trainees' portfolios, organisational policies and procedures, internal and external verifier reports, contracts, trainees' files, reviews, individual training plans and other documentary evidence. They observed and graded two training sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Health, care & public services	1	1				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Health, care & public services (care)

**Grade 1**

6. MACTAC currently has 39 trainees on government-funded programmes, working towards NVQ level 2 or 3 in early years care and education. Twenty-nine are on work-based training for adults and 10 are clients on the New Deal full-time education and training option. There are five men on the programmes. All trainees are over 18, and are in work placements in local community and private nurseries, playgroups, schools, a Scope early years' centre and a health club crèche. MACTAC is currently working with 85 employers in the area. Trainees attend every two weeks for off-the-job training sessions at MACTAC, where they have a combination of theory and practical sessions and receive individual support from the staff. Trainees have the use of the training room and the books and resources in it. There are currently six trainers/assessors employed by MACTAC and also 15 work-based assessors. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-

assessment report. They did not identify any significant weaknesses. The grade awarded was higher than the self-assessment grade.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent off-the-job training
- ◆ high-quality accommodation and training resources
- ◆ assessment well-tailored to trainees' needs
- ◆ strong links between centre staff, trainees and work-based supervisors
- ◆ exceptionally well-organised and comprehensive portfolios
- ◆ excellent achievement rates

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*An example of good practice in supporting placement providers without workplace assessors is MACTAC's 'witness testimony information pack'. This gives detailed information to placement providers on the kind of account to make when witnessing trainees' activity in the workplace. It gives guidance on the evidence required and how to report on the trainees' demonstration of competence.*

7. Trainees receive high-quality, off-the-job training sessions. They are well planned and resourced, and provided by very experienced and skilled tutors who are also suitably qualified. The training sessions observed included a range of effective teaching and learning strategies, had breadth and depth, and were fun. Trainees were actively involved, and the sessions linked well to their work practice. The New Deal clients have equal access to all the off-the-job training and assessment sessions, and are equally well supported in their placements.

8. Assessment procedures are effective and appropriate to the needs of the trainees. Trainees are aware of the assessment process, plan their own assessments and produce high quality and well-organised portfolios. Assessment is carried out regularly each month, either by work-based assessors or peripatetic assessors employed by the centre. They also carry out off-the-job training and support the work-based assessors. As a result, trainees are making steady progress and generally meeting targets. In 1997-98, 70 per cent of new trainees gained an NVQ. The retention figures are good with only 30 per cent of trainees leaving the programme early. Most of these early leavers left due to pregnancy, or because they had acquired employment. The New Deal clients are successfully completing their NVQ level 2 within their allocated timescales.

9. Centre staff frequently contact work-placement supervisors, employers and assessors. They have produced two information packs for employers, which give effective guidance about the training and their role within it, with particular emphasis on how to write witness testimonies in line with the NVQ standards. Trainees are well supported in their work placements.

10. There are three-monthly assessors' meetings, which are generally well attended, where standardisation issues are frequently discussed. The meetings are minuted and sent to absent assessors. However, the minutes are quite brief so that the assessors unable to attend meetings do not have a full picture of the issues discussed and action taken.

11. Trainees' evidence of their competence in the workplace, required for the NVQ, is in line with awarding body documents and meets their requirements. However, it is not fully mapped against the standards. Internal verification is carried out as an ongoing process. There has been sampling of unit assessment, but much of the sampling has not been fully recorded until the portfolio is complete. However, in the last six months a more effective recording system has been used for sampling of portfolios and for monitoring of assessor practice.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

12. MACTAC has an equal opportunities policy, which is given to all staff and trainees at induction. Employers also receive a copy in their information pack, which includes equal opportunities, and complaints and grievance procedures. Equal opportunities is an integral part of the training and is included on the agenda of all staff meetings. MACTAC encourages trainees from some of the most disadvantaged groups in the area, which have high levels of unemployment. It has its own employment agency through which it attempts to find work for as many trainees as possible. The new purpose-built centre has been designed to provide access to people with disabilities. Inspectors agreed the strength in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. The weakness was not confirmed but additional weaknesses were identified. The grade awarded is higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ positive action to encourage trainees from disadvantaged groups
- ◆ staff committed to equal opportunities
- ◆ equal opportunities effectively integrated with the training programme

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little formal monitoring and review of equal opportunities
- ◆ no reference to legislation in equal opportunities documents

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*An example of good practice in making training accessible, is where MACTAC is working with a number of local community groups to set up training provision and childcare for unemployed people. One such project aims to overcome specific barriers to those needing extra support by providing free childcare locally, plus provision for one-to-one counselling and advice.*

13. The centre has successfully put many schemes into place through European Social Fund, Urban Regeneration and other initiatives. This funding has enabled the local population to gain access to training. This has resulted not only in childcare workers gaining a qualification, but in the expansion of and raised quality of local playgroups and other childcare establishments. Many mature people who have been working in childcare for a number of years, either paid or voluntary, now have an NVQ qualification. One trainee who started two years ago as a volunteer in a school doing a level 1 course, has now completed NVQ level 3 and is about to enter teacher training.

14. Staff are committed to providing opportunities for training in a relaxed and informal setting for people who would not have the confidence to go to a more formal training establishment. There are currently five men in training, including one mature trainee, and placements have a positive attitude to men in childcare. Work placements are required to sign an agreement, which includes adherence to the centre's equal opportunities policy. Marketing materials have an equal opportunities statement and show positive images of men and those from minority ethnic groups, as carers.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*An example of good practice in developing employment opportunities is demonstrated through MACTAC's marketing of their childcare expertise. Merseyside police have recently started negotiations with MACTAC for the provision of a family care service for employees who have children or other dependent relatives. This will include a telephone support line on the services available and access to a network of childcare and provision of care for the elderly. This will be flexible enough to meet the needs of 24-hour shift patterns and provide emergency care as a priority for staff who are faced with urgent care problems. This will produce a substantial amount of employment for trainees.*

15. The new building caters for the needs of people with disabilities, and a loop system has been installed to aid people with hearing difficulties. A disability employment advisor was invited to speak at a recent staff meeting. There is a very small number of people from minority ethnic groups in the locality, and the staff have gone into other areas of the city to encourage recruits.

16. The training sessions observed and the portfolios sampled, show that equal opportunities is very effectively integrated into the training programme, and trainees have a high level of awareness and a positive attitude which is reflected in their work. The materials, equipment and resources available to trainees reflect a wide range of cultural perspectives and are not gender stereotyped.

17. The centre has established a childcare employment agency which has had some success in finding work for trainees on gaining their qualification. Liverpool police force has recently asked the centre to set up emergency childcare provision for police officers, which will provide employment for some of their trainees.

18. Equal opportunities is on the agenda of all staff meetings and has been included in the quality development plan. However, there is little formal monitoring and review of the equal opportunities policies and procedures. The policies have no reference to legislation such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*, but include reference to disability to ensure trainees with disabilities are supported and encouraged within the organisation.

**Trainee support****Grade 2**

19. Trainees are invited to an informal initial interview, where they are asked to complete an application form and two written questions about why they wish to work with children. Through these, the staff assess their individual requirements and learning needs. Potential trainees are not required to do a formal initial assessment. Trainees receive a thorough induction, where they are fully informed about health and safety, MACTAC's equal opportunities policy and the NVQ requirements, and where they fill in their individual training plan. All placements are required to go through a health and safety checklist with the trainees on their first day in placement. Trainees have a monthly monitoring visit by the placement officer, and a formal review every eight weeks. There is a drop-in policy at MACTAC so that all trainees have access to immediate support if they need it. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths

and weaknesses.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough induction process
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ frequent informal monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ staff respond promptly to trainees' needs
- ◆ access to a range of specialist services for trainees with additional needs

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ individual training plan not used as a working document
- ◆ reviews lack details and target-setting
- ◆ no formal initial assessment

20. Trainees have a thorough induction by the placement officer, during which they are given detailed guidance about health and safety, equal opportunities and their own rights and responsibilities. They fill in a training agreement and individual training plan, and have an introduction to NVQs. They are taken through the grievance and disciplinary procedures and encouraged to contact the centre if they have any concerns. In the induction session observed, the trainer had good, user-friendly resources and there was a relaxed atmosphere, which enabled trainees to take part in the session confidently.

21. There is a 'drop-in' policy at the centre, so that trainees' problems, both personal and in relation to their training, can be dealt with immediately. The centre staff have an awareness of, and concern for, the personal difficulties which many of the trainees are coping with in the local area, which has a very high level of unemployment with its associated problems. The centre has access to a range of specialist agencies in the area, and some of the staff have particular skills, such as sign language and counselling.

22. The staff have frequent contact with the trainees through fortnightly tutorials and regular visits to the work placements. Trainees are making good progress. Trainees fill in a comprehensive application form, which includes two written questions about their reasons for wanting to train in childcare. This is used, alongside a full interview; to determine trainees' learning needs. The policy of the centre is to have this informal assessment through discussion, rather than a formal initial assessment. MACTAC has a specific policy regarding inclusion that focuses on acceptance rather than creating further barriers to training.

23. The trainees fill in an individual training plan at induction, but this is not a working document, and is not used again to inform the trainees' progress, or to record any changes. Although the informal monitoring is good, reviews are not fully effective. They lack detail and do not set time limits on targets. Workplace supervisors are consulted about trainees' progress, but they are not asked to make a written statement, or to sign the review document, and they do not receive a copy.

Recently, two additional review records have been introduced, one for the trainee, and one for the workplace supervisor. However, this has resulted in an over-complicated system.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

24. Management and staffing structures within MACTAC are clear and understood by all staff. The management structure is recorded and staff roles are identified. There are individual job descriptions and a comprehensive staff development and training policy with appropriate procedures for staff appraisal. MACTAC has a compliment of nine full- and eight part-time staff. There is an organisational development plan and staff training and development is linked to the strategic aims. Staff are occupationally experienced and appropriately qualified, or working towards assessor/verifier awards. Inspectors identified different strengths and weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report, and awarded a higher grade than that given through self-assessment.

### GOOD PRACTICE

*An example of the benefit to community provision is one community playgroup, where all the staff are voluntary and funding from external sources is minimal. Local parents, who regularly help out at the playgroup, are taking up training with MACTAC to NVQ levels 2 and 3. This is part of the adult training for work programme. The playgroup is providing a better quality of service to the children as a result of the trainees' input. The playgroup leader says she is able to reflect on her practice as she is challenged by new ideas and approaches to childcare and education issues, and is more secure about the playgroup's survival owing to regular parent/trainee help. There is added community value to the trainees' personal development through training, as they become aware of their own parenting role. They say they want to support and develop the playgroup and raise the standard of early years care and education in their community.*

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and effective information pack for placement providers
- ◆ excellent communication with a wide range of external agencies
- ◆ well co-ordinated on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ effective use of management data to inform training

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ informal meetings and decisions made are not recorded

25. MACTAC provides a useful and comprehensive information pack for work-placement providers. This includes information on the organisational values, policies and procedures. Further information about the assessment process, the NVQ standards for each occupational area, and the training MACTAC provides, is also included. There is a section on roles and responsibilities, which outlines the position of trainees and some of their rights. Staff at MACTAC are involved in the development of organisational policies and procedures and take responsibility for communicating these to placement providers, workplace assessors and trainees.

26. Managers set targets for recruitment of trainees and monitor achievement. This information is shared at managers meetings and at regular staff meetings. Any deficiencies in the achievement of targets are identified and effective marketing of the programme is undertaken to address the shortfall. There are effective internal working relationships between all staff and trainees and good communication with external agencies and other interested parties. MACTAC invites speakers to staff meetings to inform the staff team of issues which affect the programmes and the trainees' experience of training. Staff and management are actively involved in local forums, partnerships and networks that are concerned with community development, employment or training issues. This has enabled successful bids for funding to

expand the provision. The Vauxhall Neighbourhood Council nursery manager and centre manager offer consultancy, talks and training, making links with groups to share good practice and develop effective community support services.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*An example of good practice in communicating information to placement providers is MACTAC's 'information pack'. This gives detailed information about MACTAC's off-the-job training, assessment, the NVO and support services as well as useful information about trainees and placement providers' roles and responsibilities.*

27. On- and off-the-job training is effectively linked to both NVQ standards and the trainees' personal and placement, developmental needs. The work with trainees' complements and improves the quality of some community provision as local people develop skills, experience and knowledge of good childcare practice. This is central to MACTAC's role and mission.

28. MACTAC collects data on trainees' achievements, retention rates, gender, disability and ethnicity as well as trainees' evaluation of training sessions. The information is collated and presented to managers. This information is analysed and used to inform the training provision, either through the targeting of marketing materials or the alteration of training programmes. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their performance through staff appraisal which is informed through trainees' evaluation of tutorial sessions.

29. There is a lot of informal contact and discussion between MACTAC's staff. This enables issues to be quickly addressed or dealt with in advance of problems occurring. However, the informal discussions are not recorded and, therefore, have no value to those staff not involved in the debates, and opportunities are lost to share good practice.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

30. MACTAC has a comprehensive quality assurance policy and procedures, which have been developed over time and relate to TEC contractual requirements, as well as broader operational issues. MACTAC is regularly audited for compliance against TEC contracts and is routinely subject to its own internal verification process, as well as external verification by the awarding body. Strengths identified in the self-assessment report were found to reflect normal practice or were not considered significant.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ comprehensive and detailed quality assurance policy and procedures
- ◆ feedback gathered from trainees and evaluated

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ lack of effective internal auditing and action plans
- ◆ no review of programmes

31. MACTAC has a clear policy on quality assurance and effective procedures to enable its implementation. The procedures relate to all of MACTAC's work from recruitment and selection of trainees, through to the trainee's exit from training and

follow-up procedures. Policies and procedures are dated and signed by the centre manager. All staff are aware of the policy and procedures and show commitment to improving the quality of training provision. This is demonstrated through trainees' evaluation of tutorial provision and the attention given to staff's performance and appraisal. Employers' views are sought during monitoring visits to trainees and included in the overall evaluation of training. There is clear indication of changes being made to training and the quality of information shared with trainees, work-placement providers and training staff, as a result of feedback from all parties. External verification reports are complimentary and there are no outstanding issues highlighted on reports. The TEC quality audits are regularly undertaken and issues of concern quickly addressed and formally recorded.

32. Achievement data are collected and used to improve the delivery of training, and measure performance against set targets. However, there is no systematic arrangement to review programmes. There is no formal recording of regular internal quality audits or of specific action plans. Plans are closely monitored to address some of the weaknesses identified by the organisation. The self-assessment process has begun to address this issue and plans to implement regular self-assessment, on a quarterly basis, is being proposed.

33. The self-assessment report produced by the organisation in February 1999 was developed through a very inclusive process, involving MACTAC's staff at all levels and feedback from trainees. Judgements in the report were based on good evidence and many of the weaknesses identified had been addressed by the time of inspection. However, the company underestimated its strengths in care and management of training. Self-assessment has appeared as a regular agenda item at staff meetings since June 1998. The organisation found self-assessment a useful exercise, and plan to regularly re-visit their initial action plan to review progress.