

website: www.qca.org.uk/ni



Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
2nd Floor, Glendinning House, 6 Murray Street, Belfast, BT1 6DN
Tel: 028 9033 0706 Fax: 028 9023 1621 E-mail: infol@qca.org.uk
website: www.qca.org.uk/ni



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PARTNERSHIPS
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs





New Opportunities: St John Ambulance And Ulster Community Hospitals Trust

The background

In October 1998 a meeting was held to discuss the introduction of the St John Ambulance new care package to Northern Ireland. At this meeting clarification was sought on why the national headquarters had designed a care package which failed to provide members of the St John Ambulance with a nationally recognised qualification.

After further discussions the Deputy Chief Officer Nursing, Area Commissioner and District Commissioner gave their full support to the St John Ambulance Eastern Area running an NVQ project in Northern Ireland in conjunction with the introduction of the St John Ambulance Care Package, which was designed to link into the NVQ in Care.

A two year partnership to facilitate the Eastern Area NVQ Project was established between the St John Eastern Area Care Team and the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust NVQ Assessment Centre.

The aims and objectives of the partnership are as follows:

Aim

To test the feasibility of improving the quality of care provided by St John Ambulance volunteers through the integration of care training within the NVQ framework.

Objectives

- To improve the skills and knowledge of St John Ambulance volunteers and recognise individual achievement with a national award.
- To improve the standards of teaching care within the organisation.
- To develop links with an NVQ Assessment Centre.
- To have nursing officers within St John Ambulance approved as assessors and verifiers.

The NVQ programme

The 1999 annual autumn training day gave an opportunity to advise other interested St John volunteers on the Eastern Area's expectations with regard to the NVQ Project.

The Area Community Care Officer held a series of meetings with the Manager of the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust NVQ Assessment Centre to plan how the scheme would work on a day to day basis.

The criteria for potential candidates were that they had membership of St John over 2 years and completed a St John care course.

The Assessment Centre provided an NVQ awareness session, which was followed by an introduction to the NVQ in Care. Agreements were reached on equal opportunities, appeals and support from the centre. It was agreed that the centre would work with St John Ambulance on a 'not for profit basis'; previously the centre had only provided training and support 'in-house'.

To ensure the quality assessment and verification process any St John candidate undertaking a level 3 award is assessed by a St John assessor but internally verified by a Trust employee. Candidates of the Trust undertaking a training award are assessed by a Trust assessor and verified by a member of St John Ambulance.

The Assessment Centre's management structure was being reorganised, in consultation with the external verifier from City and Guilds and it was decided that the Management Board would have overall responsibility for running the centre with an appointment on the Board from St John Ambulance.

Funding of the scheme

The Area Community Care Officer met with St John volunteers who had expressed an interest in joining the pilot scheme to discuss the principles of funding. It was decided that volunteers would give their time and commitment and pay their travel costs to workshops or other training, however the Eastern Area Care Team, through sponsorship, would cover all registration and certification costs to the awarding body.

Having established the principles of funding, sponsorship was received from the following 5 companies which enabled the pilot to proceed:

- Enkalon Foundation
- Intersurgical Northern Ireland
- Medical Supplies (NI) Ltd

- Northern Ireland Electricity
- The Katherine Howard Foundation.

The success of candidates achieving level 2 and level 3 in Care has proved that it is possible to run NVQs for St John volunteers as part of and as an extension to the care package. The links with the Assessment Centre have been established and tested with both organisations gaining a great deal from the partnership.

Benefits to the partners

The Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust NVQ Assessment Centre has gained considerably from being involved with a major national and international voluntary organisation, with a world wide name for service and duty and an excellent reputation for training and the development of training materials.

An unexpected outcome was the availability of a small pool of potential recruits - one of the first St John volunteers to complete her Care NVQ and one of the newly qualified assessors now work for the Trust. The Assessment Centre also gained access to a verifier with extensive experience across a range of awards. This verifier has become the lead verifier for learning and development awards in the Assessment Centre.

The future

A great deal has been achieved within the NVQ Project in the Eastern Area and the implications

have significant local and national importance both within the voluntary sector in general and St John Ambulance in particular. Within the Eastern Area it is recommended that the Area Nursing Team continue to provide support to volunteers wishing to undertake an NVQ in Care at level 2, alongside the St John Ambulance Care Package. A level 3 NVQ would be relevant for members providing care who are not under direct supervision.

The Area Nursing Team should also review the full range of NVQs to give volunteers greater recognition for what they do in St John and help them to perform their role to an even higher standard.

The Care Team will negotiate a continuation of the relationship with the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust NVQ Assessment Centre, allowing awards to be made on a 'not for profit basis'.

Recommendations have been made to St John Areas and Counties to review their training programme and consider the benefits available to volunteers and to the organisation by embracing the NVQ framework. The Eastern Area has shown what can be done and the Area Commissioner states:

'It is essential in this modern age, if we in St John wish to recruit and retain high calibre volunteers that we invest in our people and maximise every opportunity for their skills to be appropriately recognised.'