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C A R E



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P A R T N E R S H I P S  
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs





CARE

## Partners In Care: The Care Assessment Centre Northern Ireland

### The background

The Care Assessment Centre Northern Ireland (CACNI) was established in 1994 when, with some financial support from the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, a number of agencies formed a partnership whose purpose was to provide a mechanism for the childcare and social care voluntary sector to access NVQs.

Following a number of preliminary information meetings the agencies listed below gave a commitment to be part of the proposed partnership and to work together to gain recognition as an NVQ assessment centre.

- Belfast Central Mission
- Down and Connor Playgroups
- Northern Ireland Childminding Association
- Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
- 123 House
- Ulster Quaker Service Committee
- Voluntary Service Bureau Belfast.

All 7 agencies were taking a preliminary step into NVQ development with each bringing their own particular organisational needs. However, the CACNI mission statement drafted then, and currently in use, reflects both that individual need and the overall vision for the partnership.

*'The Care Assessment Centre Northern Ireland (CACNI) exists to enable competent workers in voluntary member and associate organisations to access a way of formally recognising the skills and knowledge they have acquired and to gain a vocational qualification. CACNI members believe that the outcomes are well worth the effort required as service delivery for users is enhanced and workers and organisations profit from continuous development.'*

The primary aim of the initial stage was to receive awarding body approval to offer a range of NVQ awards in Social Care and Child Care and Education. In October 1995 this was achieved and in November 1995 the first candidates were registered.

### The partnership

Early discussions focused on the need for quality assurance systems, a clearly defined value base and ways of collaborative working that would underpin CACNI policies and practices. Criteria for membership of the partnership were also agreed. All partnership members would have a representative on the Management Board. Representatives should be a senior member of staff and have the authority to influence the organisation's resources as required. They also had to attend at least 75% of management meetings. The commitment and willingness of the individual organisational members to the development of the partnership was and continues to be crucial in achieving success.

Regular internal verifier, standardisation meetings and assessment board meetings were instigated. Membership of the assessment board included assessors and internal verifiers, as well as management board members. This structure was designed to provide a mechanism where mutual feedback from candidates and management

board members could be accessed for planning, operational and standardisation purposes. Sub groups dealing with particular issues such as training, finance and quality systems were also established.

Committed to offering a quality service to candidates right from induction, CACNI held a number of information days for potential candidates and assessors.

This first year also provided a period for the individual members and the partnership as a whole to identify, negotiate and agree realistic targets, particularly in regard to candidate completion. There was consensus too that the ratio of work-based assessors and internal verifiers to candidate numbers was crucial. External provision was accessed to deliver training for a small number of work-based assessors and internal verifiers to meet the needs of candidates.

CACNI's first operational year saw success as 11 candidates achieved their awards at levels 2 and 3, as well as the 8 assessors and internal verifiers.

The mutual feedback systems built into the structure enabled both achievements and difficulties to become apparent. This enabled changes and improvements to documentation and practices to be made rapidly and with consensus.

### **Key development milestones**

- By the end of 2001 approximately 300 partnership candidates had achieved NVQ awards.

- CACNI gained approval to offer the vocational assessor and internal verifier awards. 33 work-based assessors and 14 internal verifiers have also achieved their awards through the CACNI partnership.

- The development of the part-time administrator role as a co-ordinator, to provide a central cohesive point of contact for all, was pivotal in maintaining communication and information and standardisation among the partnership.

- A sponsorship model has been developed for smaller voluntary agencies who do not yet have the resources to put an NVQ infrastructure in place, but who want to offer NVQ assessment to staff. A full CACNI member becomes their sponsor and all CACNI quality assurance systems are equally applied with peripatetic assessment planned as required. Over a two-year period 17 candidates from smaller voluntary agencies have successfully achieved awards in this way.

- Whilst Voluntary Service Bureau and 123 House left the partnership due to changes in their own NVQ development, a new member, Leonard Cheshire Belfast, joined in January 2001. CACNI hopes to expand its membership by increasing the range of social and childcare qualifications available and attracting new members.

### **The future**

In 2001 a strategic plan was formulated to set medium to long-

term targets for the partnership. These include:

- Piloting the NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.
- Exploring occupational awards in collaboration with the Community Justice National Training Organisation and awaiting the introduction of the revised Supported Housing NVQs that may be added to the range of NVQs available through CACNI.
- Seeking status as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status.

The one major limitation in CACNI's development is lack of sustained funding. The partnership exists on a voluntary, not for profit, basis. Individual members do contribute to CACNI funds through an administrative fee paid on behalf of each agency and individual candidate registration but the management board recognises the primary need to secure adequate funding for future development.

If this is secured, the CACNI partnership is more committed than ever to ensuring the quality of the awards offered and the credibility of the centre. This is crucial if the individual members and the partnership as a whole are to be part of the system responsible for making sure there are appropriately trained staff, paid and unpaid, who are capable of delivering high quality services to people in need.

Which, after all, brings it back to where it started!