

National Qualifications for Classroom Assistants

Colin Raine



Left to right - Colin Raine (Academy Director), Liz Dingley (Candidate), Mary Cooke (Headteacher), Sarah Kenney (Assessor), Kim Shakespeare (Candidate), Nicola Dean (Academy Director)

Two classroom assistants from Moorcroft School, a special school for students with severe, profound and/or multiple learning difficulties based in the London Borough of Hillingdon, have achieved what has long claimed to be unlikely or impossible. In approximately eight months they have each been awarded the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 (Caring for Children and Young People) in an autism-specific environment.

The Children & Young People Award at Level 3, introduced in May 1998, is a welcome addition to the NVQ family. It has enabled classroom assistants like Kim Shakespeare and Liz Dingley to recognise the impact their skills, knowledge, experience, approach and attitude have on the school's success. That success has been made possible thanks to the skills, dedication and application

of their work-based assessor, Sarah Kenney, a senior teacher in the school. By arrangement with the school Sarah has given approximately one hour per week to each candidate to ensure that the process of assessment has run smoothly.

Sarah describes her experience as a work-based assessor in the following way. 'The sequence of events was very logically set out and once in the swing of it, very easy to follow'. She was surprised at first to find that the emphasis is about candidate competence, unlike other qualifications she had experienced before. 'I felt initially that I wasn't teaching anyone anything. The thing that surprised me most was that extremely talented staff did not recognise their skills until they had the opportunity to think about them in more detail. I needed to ensure that I had sufficient theoretical knowledge to

stay three steps ahead of the process, and the candidates.'

Sarah was trained and qualified in vocational assessment skills by the NVQ Academy. During the assessment of her candidates and by constructing and providing portfolio evidence she has achieved the Vocational Assessor Award D32/D33. She adds 'I was helped greatly by the on-going support I received from the Academy through regular visits, phone and fax throughout the whole process'.

The NVQ Academy (based in Bedfordshire) has pioneered the introduction of NVQs in a specialist environment throughout England and Wales. The Academy initially worked as 'The NVQ Assessment Centre for Autism Specific Services' to help those working and living with people with autism to obtain qualifications. Latterly it has expanded to 'tailor and customise' Unit and Level requirements of those living and working with people with learning disabilities, severe/profound and/or multiple difficulties, under the banner of 'The NVQ Assessment Centre for Learning Disability Services'.

Two other Divisions make up the NVQ Academy family. They are: 'Management Matters' which was introduced in 1999 as a division of the NVQ Academy to provide for the Certificate and Diploma in Management and NVQs in Management at Levels 3, 4 and 5 in the above mentioned specialist areas; and 'Nic-IT' - designing, producing and maintaining customised Information Technology and Databases to complement the specialist divisions.

Care Advisory Teams consisting