

Quality Assurance: Rest assured with QCS

QCS gives SME care providers the confidence to achieve CQC compliance with an emphasis on Quality Assurance, believes National Care Association chief executive Sheila Scott

A life-long dedication to care

Mrs Sheila Scott OBE is Chief Executive of the National Care Association (NCA). Care is Sheila Scott's life; she possesses a strong command of the issues facing the care sector informed by her long career as a nursing professional, the owner and manager of a care business and as a leader in the care sector. Her work with the National Care Association, the voice of the independent care sector in the UK, continues to shape her views.



National Care Association represents small and medium organisations in the registered care sector such as those providing care home and domiciliary care services. Like many trade organisations, one of the National Care Association's key functions is to lobby the Government to benefit both its members and the people in their care. Besides lobbying, the National Care Association provides members with information and training and also works with the regulator. This may take the form of representing the interests of members in complex or unusual regulatory situations.

Other trade bodies perform a similar role for segments of the care sector such as nursing homes or voluntary organisations. However, the majority of independent care organisations are small and medium sized businesses and their membership of the National Care Association means that it remains highly influential.

This positions National Care Association at a crucial juncture where a variety of information streams within the sector converge. When these streams are assembled and processed by an individual like Sheila Scott, for whom care is a way of life that has been reinforced with life-long sector experience, it tends to yield meaningful analysis.

Given the pivotal role the independent care sector plays in ensuring social cohesion and the significant pressures resulting from increasing demand, rising costs and falling budgets, meaningful analysis is perhaps of more value than ever.

The challenges for care providers and the role of the National Care Association

"Small and medium sized care providers face enormous challenges. In comparison with larger enterprise scale organisations they have limited resources with which to ensure that they comply with legislative codes," says Sheila Scott.

The legislature, the Department of Health and the CQC form a tripartite mechanism which makes the laws, issues guidance and regulates providers. A bit like the three-legs of a stool, this promises stability. However, the influence of the media and politics now puts the care sector under a brighter

Key Facts

Sheila Scott chief executive NCA

- Over 20 years experience with the NCA
- Career spanning nursing, care business ownership and management, now a care sector leader
- Pivotal role of care sector and significant pressures make meaningful analysis of more value than ever

Challenges for SME care providers and the role of the NCA

- Frequent upheavals in care sector resulting from irrational cycle of initiatives
- For SME care providers achieving compliance and keeping up with changing compliance requirements
- For NCA it is providing good advice and making recommendations if appropriate

Benefits of QCS compliance management

- A leading solution for achieving CQC compliance and inspection
- Development is ongoing and guided by strategic insight
- Optimised for the needs of SME care providers
- Successfully combines the requirements of compliance management with the practical considerations of the care environment

Quality Assurance

- Changes currently in the pipeline mean a more robust and rigorous approach to regulation
- Demonstrating quality becoming increasingly important government expectation of registered providers
- Quality management an important factor in compliance star rating system
- QCS documents where you are now and the steps taken to improve the quality of your care service
- Drives management and leadership, the keys to providing really good care
- Knowing it meets the needs of many other SME care providers gives confidence in the system

spotlight than ever before. This sometimes manifests itself as sensationalised press coverage which thrust events to the fore, frequently precipitating knee-jerk political reactions. Sheila Scott says, "This undermines stability by creating an operating environment where upheaval is frequent. An initiative is launched which supersedes an existing one. Often this is before the existing one has had time to be fully rolled out, or at least the results become known and fed forward to shape the next initiative. This situation affects smaller and medium sized care organisations more than their larger counterparts.

If you put yourself in the shoes of a medium sized care business, perhaps owner managed, how do you keep track of all the national developments? From the perspective of compliance, there are two parts to the problem. Firstly, achieving compliance, and secondly, keeping up to date with changing compliance requirements," says Sheila Scott.

Understanding the problems faced by National Care Association members brings the role of National Care Association into sharp focus. "National Care Association is there for its members, to keep them up to date and help them to deal with this. The challenge for us is to provide a range of services to help our members with the complexities that this creates. Compliance and regulation is clearly a major area where we need to provide good advice and make recommendations if appropriate," Sheila Scott says.

Helping to ensure QCS benefits independent SME care providers

"National Care association had worked quite closely with one supplier before but the product was no longer relevant to the needs of all our members. About two year ago we drew back and took a decision not to directly endorse one over another. We took a position that we would understand what is available and recommend those that we think suitable. We say to National Care Association members that "there is a choice", and we help to inform the choices they make," Sheila Scott says.

Sheila Scott is one of a number of care experts that consults with QCS. She provides a strategic viewpoint which provides direction on the development of the system. Her vast experience as a nurse and care home operator is coupled to the insight gained from over 20 years with National Care Association. This enables her to provide essential input which ensures the system is optimised for the needs of independent SME care organisations, National Care Association's members.

The development of the relationship with QCS followed an organic path. Awareness of what QCS provides grew through a mixture of professional and interpersonal touch points. It was a gradual process which eventually filtered QCS through to Sheila Scott on merit.

"QCS was looking for the input to ensure it remains a leading solution for achieving CQC compliance and inspection. Although it is separate to my work with National Care Association, I was attracted to it because there is a clear benefit for National Care Association's membership," says Sheila Scott.

The sector intelligence Sheila Scott provides enables QCS to successfully combine the requirements of compliance management with the practical considerations of the care environment. This enables QCS to optimise the system so that it provides a pragmatic solution to the regulatory challenge faced by the National Care Association's members.

About QCS

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Quality Assurance for small and medium sized care providers

As the care sector absorbs the recommendations of the Francis Report, the climate of regulation is in the process of becoming more robust and rigorous.

Sheila Scott says, "The demonstration of quality is becoming increasingly important and it is a key government expectation of registered providers. If you don't have a system in place to show compliance then you cannot have a system in place to demonstrate that you have a programme to improve quality."

"A system like QCS documents where you are now and the steps you are taking to improve the quality of your service. The Care Quality Commission has announced that it is introducing a quality rating system. Quality management will play an important part in determining how a service provider is rated," says Sheila Scott.

She continues: "Every provider needs a quality management system whether they design their own or buy one. Finding a system that is absolutely fit for this purpose is really important because it drives management and leadership, which are the keys to providing really good care."

On one recent visit to a National Care Association member's site Sheila Scott discovered that the small nursing home had recently opted for a management system which she only found out was QCS when she arrived. "The ease with which the owner was beginning to implement it was very impressive."

"Registered managers have a huge job to record all the evidence that is required. To actually have a system that is satisfying the needs of so many other small and medium sized care providers gives you confidence. You don't have to worry about things not being covered and this truly demonstrates that QCS is fit for purpose."

QCS is meeting the needs of so many registered providers because it covers all the angles and not just one. It's easy to buy in a solution to address an area that is particularly problematic such as infection control. But in reality the provider and the registered manager need to have it all covered," Sheila Scott says.