

Focus Training and Development

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		14–18 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Following rapid improvements, a high proportion of learners now successfully achieve their apprenticeship frameworks and qualifications.
- Learners develop good vocational, commercial and employability skills that increase their confidence and knowledge, enabling them to excel in the workplace.
- Dedicated and enthusiastic assessors successfully support and inspire learners and make learning relevant for them.
- Good pastoral support, particularly the very effective mentoring programme for 16–18-year-olds, enables learners to settle quickly into their first experience in work and make good early progress.
- Clear vision and strategic direction by the leadership team has developed provision that meets both local and national priorities and employers' needs.
- A successful and highly effective restructuring of the organisation has led to managers and staff focusing more effectively on quality and improving learners' experiences.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The proportion of learners who successfully achieve their qualification is still low on a minority of courses.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.
- Not all training and assessment provide learners with sufficiently detailed targets that would enable them to progress through their qualifications more quickly and assist them to develop independent learning skills.
- Staff appraisals are not sufficiently rigorous to monitor individual staff performance against challenging targets and goals.
- Learners' and employers' surveys do not effectively provide information or feedback to assist in the drive for improvement.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications, particularly on the small number of programmes that are currently performing less successfully so that the proportion who achieve within the planned timescale remains high for all learners.
- Further improve teaching, learning and assessment so that more sessions are outstanding. Continue to support and develop the internal quality assurers (IQAs) so that they are more able to lead on improving the quality of provision.
- Improve the quality and recording of the targets agreed and set with learners so that they are sufficiently challenging for all. Encourage further development of independent learning skills and make it clear to learners what they need to do to improve their skills and knowledge further.
- Review and improve the staff appraisal process so that it more effectively focuses on evaluation of performance against agreed targets and objectives.
- Improve the use of learners' and employers' surveys so that they can fully contribute to improvement through the self-assessment process.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for learners are now good following a significant improvement in the proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their qualifications. In 2011/12, the first year that Focus Training and Development (FTD) delivered large numbers of apprenticeships, the proportions that successfully completed their qualifications within the planned timescale were below the national average. The proportions who now achieve their qualification, and who do so within the planned timescale, significantly exceed the national averages. ▪ A very high proportion of apprentices in security services, manufacturing technologies, warehousing and distribution, and environmental services successfully achieve their qualifications, a good proportion of these doing so within the planned timescale. In 2012/13, the proportion of learners successfully achieving apprenticeships in administration and business management improved significantly to around the national average. A high proportion of these learners achieved their qualifications within the planned period. ▪ Although relatively small in number, the proportion of apprentices in health and social care who successfully achieved their qualification was low in 2011/12 and this declined further in 2012/13. FTD delivered a small number of construction apprenticeships for the first time in 2012/13, subcontracted to another provider. The proportion of learners who successfully completed their construction qualification was low. ▪ In 2011/12, the proportion of adults following other workplace-learning qualifications who successfully achieved these within the planned time was adequate and similar to the national average. In 2012/13, this improved and the proportion of adults who successfully achieved their qualifications was high and most did so within the planned timescale. ▪ Pass rates on short courses aimed at better preparing learners for work through employability training programmes are high. However, the proportion of these learners that subsequently gain employment is low. ▪ Apprentices and workplace learners develop good vocational and employability skills that help them to do their jobs efficiently. Learners successfully develop and improve their English and mathematical skills. Employers value the improvement that learners make in these skills and the assistance it provides in helping them to become more versatile employees. Learners on employability training courses improve their confidence and motivation. 	

- Few differences exist between the achievement rates of learners from different ethnic groups, other than White British learners who tend to be slightly less successful than other groups. Although achievement rates are improving, gaps exist between males who achieve better than females and 16- to 18-year-olds who achieve better than older learners.
- Progression for learners from intermediate-level qualifications to advanced-level qualifications is adequate. The vast majority of apprentices continue their employment on completion of their programme.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, reflecting the development of good vocational and employability skills for learners and the high proportion who gain qualifications and complete apprenticeships. Good training, assessment and support enable learners to make good progress and they quickly improve their confidence in the workplace.
- Assessors have good occupational experience and provide effective training that relates closely to the learners' workplaces and life experiences. Practical lessons delivered at the newly established construction provision are well organised and assessors effectively demonstrate good techniques to learners. Learners' practical work is efficiently marked, with appropriate suggestions for improvements made by assessors.
- The quality of individual coaching is good for the majority of learners. In business improvement techniques, coaching is effective at developing learners' theoretical knowledge and in enabling them to apply these skills in their workplace. For example, one learner radically improved working practices in the workplace following discussions with his assessor. The learner's employer greatly appreciated these improvements.
- The quality and availability of learning resources for most learners are good. Construction learners benefit from good tools and materials to practise their practical skills. Access to information and communication technology for most learners is good and learners make good use of the internet to develop independent learning skills. In one-to-one coaching sessions for learners on warehouse programmes, good use is made of digital recorders and video recordings to capture evidence.
- Employers and FTD staff have high expectations of learners regarding the standard of their work, their potential to progress onto higher-level courses and their promotion potential. Trainers are flexible when arranging visits, taking good account of learners' and employers' needs due to the demands of work. Support for young learners is particularly effective in helping them to settle into a workplace environment.
- Assessment is good. On the majority of courses, assessors use an appropriate range of assessment methods and make effective use of technology. Assessment on employability courses is good, with learners benefiting from continuous assessment and feedback on their performance and progress. However, for a minority of learners in business and administration, assessment does not result in sufficiently clear targets to guide them to prepare high-quality evidence from their work for the next assessment visit or to provide sufficient challenge for learners that are able to progress more quickly.
- Initial assessment is good and effectively identifies learning and support needs. Staff place learners on programmes that appropriately meet their and their employers' needs. Initial and diagnostic assessments correctly identify the levels in English and mathematics that learners should be working towards. Learners who are already at the level required for their qualification are encouraged to take higher-level qualifications in order to improve their knowledge and provide an additional challenge for them.
- Reviews of learners' progress on apprenticeship programmes are good. Most line managers are fully involved in these, enabling them to understand their contribution to training and assessment. Visits to learners are frequent and for the majority of learners assessors agree targets that are specific enough to guide progress and to challenge learners successfully.

However, for a minority of learners on business management and administration programmes some reviews do not go into sufficient detail and targets are not challenging enough.

- The integrated teaching and learning of English, mathematics and functional skills are good, enabling learners to develop these skills in their work roles. Most learners receive good quality, motivating feedback on how to improve. One learner studying for a warehousing qualification commented that he now understands why mathematics is such an important skill to have in his workplace as he sees first-hand how it applies on a daily basis. However, on employability programmes, although learners receive good guidance on how to improve their English skills within lessons, the marking of work takes place too late and contains insufficient feedback to be of real help.
- Information, advice and guidance are good, especially so for 16- to 18-year-old learners. These learners benefit from the dedicated support of a mentor who meets with them on a weekly basis, helping them to settle quickly into their workplace and make good early progress. Employers also welcome the early and frequent communication regarding learners' experiences.
- Good promotion of equality and diversity during teaching and learning activities ensures that learners have a good knowledge and understanding of both. Assessors effectively raise legislative issues linked to health and safety, safeguarding, and equality and diversity with learners in training sessions and at reviews. However, some assessors miss opportunities to extend learners' knowledge of these topics further by not utilising situations that occur in individual work environments.

Employability training

Good

Employability

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, reflecting the high numbers of learners gaining qualifications in employability. Staff are skilful in engaging young people and increasing their confidence and enthusiasm. Staff establish very positive relations with learners, engendering their respect and enjoyment for learning. Support for learners helps them complete and achieve their learning goals in short courses. Learners increase their motivation to look for work independently, improve networking skills with their peers and develop their interview skills.
- Taught sessions in employability contain a variety of activities that successfully engage and interest learners. Learners contribute very well in sessions. Tutors use a range of skilful questioning techniques to ensure that all are encouraged to participate and develop confidence in communication skills through group presentation activities. Learners respect the competency of their tutors who use personal experience and specific vocational examples to highlight key learning points relevant to interview performance, health and safety, and security.
- Assessment of learning is good within practical classroom activities and through the questioning of knowledge. Learners demonstrate competency through their involvement in a range of well-planned tasks and personal presentations to their peers. For example, a small group problem-solving activity encouraged learners to identify barriers encountered in daily life and discuss how to overcome them. Portfolios contain a good range of evidence and different assessment methods. However, they also contain unnecessary and sometimes confusing documents such as the tutor's lesson plans. Learners are not sufficiently encouraged to reference their work.
- Although learners receive guidance on improving their English and mathematical skills in lessons, the marking of their written work provides insufficient guidance on how to reduce errors and improve written English. Some assessors highlight errors without providing guidance. Although some marking of work takes place within lessons, much takes place remotely at the end of courses and learners do not benefit from any feedback.
- At the start of their employability training, learners receive motivating information, advice and guidance by FTD staff on the short courses offered through the vocational academies it has developed. Subsequent attendance and retention on the courses are good. Induction-course

handbooks comprehensively outline mutual roles and responsibilities although the quality of production and readability is poor through repeated re-copying.

- FTD is increasing links with employers to provide further vocational academies through which it plans to support the recruitment needs of the retail and hospitality industries and provide employment opportunities for learners. However, such arrangements with employers are at the early stages of development and too recent to have had a positive impact on improving the rates of progression into employment. A few learners are unclear about their entitlement to a guaranteed interview with employers and receive insufficient advice about potential progression routes.
- Learners develop good awareness of equality and diversity through learning activities that link these topics to employment and job interviews. Staff use interactive teaching methods which develop and foster good relations with customers in very short periods. Good awareness of individual needs enables staff to plan and tailor learning activities accordingly, ensuring that all learners have equality of access to learning.

Administration and business management

Apprenticeships

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and reflect the outcomes for learners, which are now good. Success rates in 2012/13 improved dramatically and significantly more quickly than other groups nationally. Assessors make clear to learners what they expect of them, motivating them to make good progress. Most are on target to achieve within agreed timescales. Individual coaching is effective at developing learners' knowledge and skills and they use these appropriately in the workplace. However, in a few weaker sessions tasks do not fully match learners' abilities and learning needs, providing insufficient stretch and challenge for the more-able learners.
- Appropriately qualified and experienced assessors provide good support for learners. Mentoring and support arrangements for young apprentices at the start of their learning programme are particularly strong. Administration learners develop effective skills in using bespoke software and when dealing with international customers on the telephone. Some learners have gained promotion to positions of increased responsibility as a result of the skills they have developed.
- Assessors carry out very frequent assessment visits at times convenient to learners and employers. Assessors provide good oral feedback that supports learners to improve their written work and to complete administrative tasks in the workplace. They accurately correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' written work.
- Assessors use a range of appropriate methods that enable learners to use varied evidence sources to demonstrate competence. However, learners are not sufficiently encouraged to make the most effective use of technology to aid evidence recording and assessment. Written feedback to learners following assessment is not always clear enough.
- Although initial assessment is thorough, the results do not routinely inform individual learning and support plans. Reviews of progress take place regularly. However, targets agreed with learners are sometimes too vague to stretch them sufficiently to develop more independent learning skills or help them to achieve more quickly.
- Employers receive good information about learners' progress and they plan appropriate work-related activities that support learners' skills development. Customer service learners develop valuable skills in dealing with a variety of customers, including international customers. Employers value the guidance given to learners by assessors, recognising that this develops valuable work-related skills.

- Learners who require additional support to improve their English, mathematics and functional skills receive appropriate help from assessors. Most learners work towards functional skills qualifications relevant to the level of their framework and in a few cases are encouraged to work to a higher level. Learners are signposted to good learning resources that effectively support the development of their functional skills.
- Learners receive good information, advice and guidance at induction and during progress reviews to enable them to make informed choices about further study and career progression. Learners value the support provided which motivates them to achieve and progress.
- Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Assessors reinforce this appropriately during assessment and progress reviews. However, they do not always make use of naturally occurring examples from learners' real workplace experiences to extend further their knowledge about equality and diversity in the setting where it is most relevant.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The managing director and senior managers have a clear strategic vision of the future developments for FTD. They articulate this clearly and include staff in the development of the training provision offered. Leaders promote a supportive culture that is ambitious and focused on aspirations for high-quality training that benefits both learners and employers. FTD has completed a successful and highly effective restructuring of the organisation and is contributing to the significant improvements seen in learners' success rates.
- The application of a range of policies and activities supports assessors and IQAs in their role. The regular quality meetings gather and make good use of feedback from internal quality assurance activities. The wide range of further meetings is very effective in communicating with all staff and maintains a strong focus on quality actions to improve the provision and performance of staff.
- IQAs hold regular one-to-one meetings with assessors to review their work. These meetings provide assessors with a good level of support and allow two-way communication. However, some records of the meetings are too brief and the document used is too simplistic to capture all aspects of assessors' performance. Their use for staff appraisal purposes is not sufficiently rigorous. Evaluation of performance lacks a detailed review of performance data and does not develop a clear action plan with allocated timescales or clearly stated decisions on an individual's performance.
- Quality assurance of the provision is good. Observations of teaching, learning and assessment, together with other quality improvement measures, have led to a significant improvement in the quality and consistency of assessors' performance. Support for individual assessors has raised the quality of their work and the learning experience for most learners.
- Well-managed quality meetings review all key aspects of performance, maintaining a good focus and attention to improving both overall success rates and completion within planned timescales. FTD has improved systems to communicate with all staff. Internal verification is rigorous and ensures that assessors complete processes to the required standard. Critical but constructive comments to assessors challenge assessment decisions appropriately to promote high standards. Managers place a strong emphasis on the impact of individual performance on overall provision.
- The quality calendar, however, consists of the dates of the wide range of meetings rather than the detail of the quality activity related to key stages in the learner journey. The presentation of management information at some meetings is inconsistent and sometimes too simplistic, failing to illustrate fully the key issues under scrutiny or performance to date.
- Self-assessment, although delayed for 2012/13, includes all staff and key stakeholders. An interim quality improvement plan continues to drive improvements and focuses fully on the major business processes and issues which have an impact on learners' successes.

- FTD carries out learners' and employers' surveys but these lack rigour and do not provide an effective response that FTD is able to use to support its drive to improve provision for all learners. Low response rates, together with questions that are not sufficiently structured to address key aspects of learners' experiences, result in information that is of little benefit.
- FTD has improved the management of subcontracted provision significantly and recently agreed contracts have been developed and implemented more effectively than previously. Contractual arrangements are clear and communication, contact and support provided by FTD are good.
- FTD develops provision in liaison with employers in order to meet both local and national needs. The provider is planning effectively to develop new provision in the hospitality sector and it continues to develop provision in construction, having established two new subcontracts in July 2013.
- The provider has taken appropriate action to ensure that staff and learners are aware of equality and diversity issues. Learners' induction adequately covers equality and diversity topics. Staff have gained external accreditation following awareness-raising training. However, they have no clearly developed strategies to promote their programmes to under-represented groups with the employers with whom they engage or to narrow the achievement gaps between groups of learners.
- The approach to safeguarding taken by FTD is adequate and meets statutory requirements. The company carries out enhanced criminal record checks to ensure the suitability of all staff that have contact with young people. Learners are aware of who they should contact if they have concerns. The company assesses risk carefully and responds appropriately to protect learners from harm or injury.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Focus Training and Development

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Employability training	2
Administration	2
Business management	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 553								
	Part-time: 181								
Principal/CEO	Ms Kully Brooks								
Date of previous inspection	September 2010								
Website address	www.focustd.co.uk								
Provider information at the time of the inspection									
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	42	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		N/A		N/A				
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	162	31	1	17	N/A	1			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	48								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ KP Skills Limited ■ Nordic Pioneer Limited ■ Northern Construction Training and Community Interest Company ■ S & D Training ■ SkillUK Limited 								

Contextual information

Based in Darlington, Focus Training and Development delivers training across the country although the majority of its programmes are delivered in the northeast of England to learners who live in the region. While the northeast region includes some prosperous areas, it also includes some areas that score very highly on the indices of socio-economic deprivation. Unemployment in the region is the highest in the United Kingdom. In the region, 11.8% of the population have no qualifications and the number of those receiving job seekers' allowance is higher than the national figure. The proportion of pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Malcolm Fraser HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the operations director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. They also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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