

Focus Training (SW) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		16–20 March 2015
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:

- a high proportion of apprentices and classroom-based learners are successful in gaining their qualifications, with a high proportion of apprentices gaining qualifications within agreed timescales; learners develop particularly good skills for work that employers value highly
- outstanding collaboration with the Local Provider Network and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and subcontractors ensures that training meets the needs of learners and employers particularly well
- strong partnership working has successfully secured funding that is well used to ensure that learners' training closely matches their needs and aspirations
- learners receive particularly good support from their employers and from training staff who are well qualified, vocationally skilled and experienced
- progression into employment, especially for employability learners and trainees, is particularly good
- advice and guidance are good; staff provide particularly effective guidance and support enabling learners to be successful both in the workplace and during their training.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- success rates are not sufficiently high in all vocational areas
- trainers do not develop sufficiently well the English language skills of all learners in their vocational training, nor do they provide sufficient feedback for learners to identify improvements
- efforts to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not had sufficient positive impact across all subject areas
- quality improvement planning is insufficiently targeted on key aspects to improve the learners' experience.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further improve success rates, particularly for apprentices, paying particular attention to retention and the reasons why learners leave training early.
- Ensure that the observation of teaching, learning and assessment process focuses more effectively on apprentices' learning, and that staff receive more detailed feedback after each observation to help improve their practice.
- Develop a robust quality improvement plan in order to make further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning for all learners.
- Ensure that training staff are appropriately trained and supported to develop the English language skills of all learners, particularly in written feedback on the learners' work.
- Ensure that the development of learners' broader employability skills are included in the targets set by their trainers and assessors.
- Make better use of the resources provided on the virtual learning environment to develop learners' study skills and enable them to take practice tests.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Focus Training (SW) Limited, trading as Focus Training and DCET Training, provides apprenticeships at intermediate and advanced levels in health and social care, electrical installation, retail and commercial enterprises, including hospitality, and business administration and management. A small number of apprentices follow frameworks from other sector subject areas. A significant proportion of the health and social care training is delivered by a subcontractor. A small group of learners are on traineeship programmes in electrical installation and arboriculture. A small, but significant, proportion of the provision is composed of classroom-based short courses, mainly aimed at getting unemployed people back into work.
- Outcomes for learners are good, which correlates well with good teaching, learning and assessment. The proportion of learners completing their programmes varies across apprenticeships. In electrical installation almost all apprentices complete their training. In other areas, a small minority of apprentices do not complete their training because they leave early. Success rates are consistently in line with or above national comparisons, and those for electrical installation are significantly higher. A high proportion of retained apprentices complete their apprenticeships successfully and within planned timescales. Apprentices enjoy their learning and the vast majority make swift progress in improving the quality of their work and in developing good levels of vocational skills. For example, apprentices in electrical installation develop excellent understanding of safe loading of domestic wiring and can accurately describe safety limits of circuit components.
- In-year data provided by Focus Training (SW) Ltd indicate success rates for apprentices are currently in line with, or better than, previous years. Success rates for classroom-based learners remain consistently high.
- The development of the learners' social and workplace skills is good. Training staff skilfully engage learners in discussions about British culture and values, including topical issues; as a result, learners are able to engage in discussions with confidence. For example, business administration apprentices were encouraged by their assessor to discuss the forthcoming general election, political party characteristics and registration for voting.

- The majority of learners make good progress. They comment positively on the training they receive from staff and are motivated to achieve. Learners are well supported in the classroom, and in the workplace, and develop high levels of vocational skill and competence. A high proportion of employability learners progress into employment; health and social care apprentices progress well from intermediate to advanced level programmes, especially where job roles allow progression to supervisory positions.
- Learners on a pilot traineeship make exceptionally good progress. These programmes are well planned, with all learners having good work experiences, in either arboriculture or electrical installation wholesale; a high proportion has progressed to a full apprenticeship and employment.
- Learners' work is of a good standard. Work carried out by health and social care apprentices is valued highly by employers. They work independently, sometimes in challenging working environments, and are growing in confidence. Hospitality learners quickly become adept at creating quality dishes and take responsibility for menu design and costing. Most learners develop useful social and work-related skills that enhance their development at work, allowing them to move more quickly into positions of trust and responsibility.
- Learners' functional skills in English and mathematics are developed well by both assessors and trainers. Many apprentices come with qualifications equivalent to the functional skill requirements of their programme; they are, however, encouraged to extend their skills, with many completing the awards to higher levels. English and mathematics are generally delivered in the workplace by vocational staff; when the need arises, sessions are arranged at a training centre to further develop and consolidate their knowledge.
- Very few differences exist in the performance of groups of learners. Managers scrutinise information to understand achievement gaps for learners and take appropriate actions to close them. In 2012/13, data indicated slightly better performance by female learners; managers' actions removed this gap in 2013/14.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learners are positive about their learning and their progress towards gaining qualifications is good. This is reflected in the high proportion of learners who achieve and their good development of practical and transferable skills. Learners in health and social care, for example, substantially improve their confidence in working with clients.
- Training staff plan the learners' programmes particularly well. Good communications with employers ensure learning is tailored well to the individual learner. Focus chooses employers carefully to ensure standards of working practices and health and safety are high. Assessor visits take good account of learners' shift work patterns. Employability programmes and traineeships include relevant work experience opportunities and a range of additional training experiences and qualifications, preparing learners well for work.
- Training staff are skilled, appropriately qualified and very experienced in their vocational areas. They have high expectations of learners. They are particularly good at developing the knowledge and skills of learners in one-to-one learning sessions in the workplace. All trainers make good use of directed questions to check understanding and reinforce learning. Learners' practical training in electrical installation and hospitality is good. However, in a minority of classroom-based lessons, trainers use a limited range of strategies to engage and motivate learners; as a result, a few learners do not make the progress expected of them.
- Learners make good use of a virtual learning environment which provides curriculum materials, assignments and functional skills practice tests; business administration and health and social care learners use it well for research and independent learning. Training staff are currently

updating the system to give better coverage for hospitality and electrical installation learners whose use is currently limited.

- Initial testing of learners is thorough and ensures they are placed on programmes which meet their vocational aspirations well. Learners' previous knowledge is used particularly well in hospitality, ensuring recruitment to appropriately demanding programmes. Training staff set appropriately challenging levels of study in English, mathematics and communication technology based on the results of initial assessment. Induction for learners is comprehensive and thorough.
- Learners receive particularly good on-course guidance and support. Training staff support learners well to succeed in the workplace and in learning centres. Learners receive well-targeted additional tuition. Electrical installation learners were positive regarding a short intensive course in information technology that prepared them well for examinations.
- Assessment is good; visits to the workplace are frequent and regular, with good involvement of the employer in planning and assessment. The use of well-designed e-portfolios, particularly in business administration and health and social care, enables a range of evidence sources to be used to particular good effect. These include extensive use of audio recordings and photographs to support written text. The portfolio software generates very useful charts and graphs, clearly indicating progress and 'still to do' lists. Learners find these particularly useful and, as a result, learners make good progress through their qualification framework.
- Most electrical installation and hospitality learners produce paper-based portfolios; these are well ordered and comprehensive, with effective incorporation of audio recordings and photographic evidence. Learners receive constructive written feedback on their work and, as a result, are able to develop and extend their knowledge well.
- Assessors know their learners well, tracking and recording progress towards vocational qualifications particularly effectively. However, the use of targets to challenge learners' broader employability skills varies significantly across vocational areas. Learners' individual targets are not always specific or measurable or consistently recorded in action plans or reviews; consequently, learners do not have a reference to guide them. Learners do not always sufficiently focus on the development of their broader skills.
- Trainers' verbal feedback to learners is good, particularly in business studies. However, in a minority of cases, trainers' written feedback focuses chiefly on awarding body requirements and in health and social care does not sufficiently include references to the development of learners' English, mathematics or communication technology skills.
- Learners' attainment of both English and mathematics skills is good, particularly at intermediate level. The skills learners need to develop are identified early and business studies learners, for example, improve their spelling and grammar particularly well through well-planned activities. However, in other occupational areas, trainers give insufficient attention to developing vocationally specific language, beyond the scope of functional skills English, but crucial for good communication within their trade. They do not always correct learners' errors in the meaning and spelling of vocational and technical words.
- Trainers promote an ethos of respect for others and give good attention to the themes of equality and diversity as they arise. They take positive action to ensure inclusion is promoted. In business studies, trainers have a good focus on treating all customers respectfully. Learners benefit from good advice on how to deal with difficult customers. They contribute well to discussions on voting in a democratic society and British cultural issues. Managers regularly review employers' health and safety and equality and diversity practices to ensure suitability of the learning environment.

Apprenticeships Employability

Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care are good because:

- vocational and functional skills qualification success rates are high; current learners are making good progress towards completing their qualifications within the time set
- learners develop a good understanding of the skills required to work with health and social care service users and greater confidence to put these skills successfully into practice
- employers, subcontractors, Jobcentre Plus and the provider work very well together to give unemployed learners courses which inspire them and develop their confidence and skills to make them readily employable in the sector
- assessors have high expectations of their learners and provide coaching which enhances their understanding of the care sector well; as a result, many aspire to progress to more senior positions in the future
- employers and assessors work closely together to ensure the material studied can be applied promptly in their workplaces; apprentices also have the opportunity to study a broad range of additional qualifications
- learners are thoroughly assessed at the start of their apprenticeship, ensuring that their programmes of study can be tailored effectively to meet their individual needs and interests
- learners receive good, prompt and supportive verbal feedback following assessment of their learning, which encourages them to persevere when they find the work challenging and enhances their opportunities to succeed
- learners who take functional skill courses develop a better understanding of English and mathematics; as a result, they extend their opportunities to progress further in their education and career
- appropriate and timely advice and guidance are readily available and give learners the support and careers advice they need, enabling them to make more informed career choices following completion of their courses.

Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care are not yet outstanding because:

- assessors and quality assurers do not give sufficient emphasis to the importance of good English in all aspects of learners' written work, particularly for those who do not require English as part of their programme; as a result, their written work does not show sufficient improvement over the course of their apprenticeships
- not all learners have access to resources to study on their own and many lack the research skills to make appropriate use of the virtual learning environment or the internet
- training staff provide insufficient written feedback on learners' vocational work indicating how they might improve in the future, particularly in the quality of their written communication, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Hospitality and service enterprises

Apprenticeships Employability

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in hospitality and service enterprises are good because:

- a large majority of apprentices successfully complete their qualification; they make good progress, particularly learners on level 3 programmes
- learners develop good work-related skills, together with a broad range of transferable skills for a variety of different work settings; in addition, learners also develop a high level of health and safety awareness and a greater understanding of budgeting and other life skills
- learners' confidence and motivation improve significantly; employers report that this increase in confidence has particularly benefited their businesses
- assessors and employers collaboratively plan the learners' programme particularly well, using their combined knowledge and skills of the industry to meet the individual occupational needs of learners
- assessors encourage and support learners to carry out independent study through work-based projects and assignments; these successfully develop work-related skills and learners' confidence to take responsibility in running the kitchens and developing menus
- trainers plan assessments well; learners receive good support and guidance from both the assessor and employer. Particularly well-planned holistic assessment captures learners' practical skills, functional skills and knowledge
- trainers use initial assessment well to match the learner to a programme and, in many cases, learners are placed on higher levels in functional skills than those required by the framework
- learners receive regular feedback and action plans at each visit and are fully aware of their progress and target date for completion
- trainers prepare learners well for the functional skill testing; they appreciate the deeper understanding it has given them with work-related tasks and everyday activities.

Teaching, learning and assessment in hospitality and service enterprise are not yet outstanding because:

- although staff identify support needs well and provide learners with extra time to complete their tasks, they do not have sufficient expertise to provide learners with the specialist support and guidance they need to improve their functional skills
- learners do not make good use of the extensive learning resources on the virtual learning environment available to them; as a result, they do not develop appropriate independent learning skills.

Administration and management

Apprenticeships

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration and management apprenticeships are good because:

- the large majority of apprentices complete their apprenticeship successfully in the planned time and develop good work-related, personal and social skills
- good initial assessment, induction, advice and guidance ensure that apprentices have a comprehensive understanding of their programme; this, linked with the employers' expectations, ensures they are on the most appropriate career path
- high levels of support and training enable apprentices to develop a good level of occupational skill and business knowledge relevant to the needs of their employer, such as producing travel

plans, service to dental patients, publicity materials for a tennis club, booking delegates on courses and producing invoices

- assessors engage apprentices well in discussions of business issues and current news, which develop their understanding of business practices, British culture and world politics, along with improving their life skills and their confidence to debate particularly well
- very effective use of the electronic portfolio system ensures clear monitoring of apprentices' progress; the large majority make rapid progress as a result of helpful individual support from assessors and employers; they increase in confidence and demonstrate a high standard of work
- the development and application of English and mathematics and information and communication technology are good; apprentices effectively transfer and apply acquired skills to their job, for instance designing promotional materials, calculating discounts, applying value added tax and using a computer booking system.

Administration and management are not yet outstanding because:

- assessors' helpful feedback is too often only verbal; consequently, apprentices do not have a record of exactly what they need to do to improve the quality of their work
- apprentices' personal targets are not always specific enough to ensure the timely completion of activities or to develop competencies and skills
- learning materials available on the virtual learning environment are not used sufficiently by apprentices to support their tasks or enable them to practise functional skills tests.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Leadership and management are good. Directors of both Focus and DCET have excellent connections with a plethora of organisations, employers and agencies across the region, and have considerable business expertise in their own right. They use their networks well to understand the local needs of employers and learners and know what skills are regional priorities. The strategic and business planning reflects these requirements succinctly.
- Directors have ambitious, realistic plans to broaden the curriculum offer and to expand the geographical reach of their core provision across the south west. The first of these plans is close to fruition and will provide additional opportunities for apprentices and their employers to develop skills in key local priority employment sectors.
- Staff have high aspirations for learners and strive to improve the successful completion of apprenticeship qualifications beyond the good standards already achieved. However, directors and managers do not emphasise the continual improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of learners sufficiently in their action plans or key performance indicator measurements.
- Partnership working with subcontractors is very good. Managers monitor the outcomes of subcontractors' apprentices well, and effective processes to ensure apprentices make good progress are in place. Subcontractors value the support provided by managers and the regular communication which takes place to resolve any issues which learners may have. Directors and managers forge very successful partnerships with other organisations. For example, collaboration with another provider provides very effective training for people who have been long-term unemployed, and the majority find work after their course.
- The quality management of the observation of teaching and learning is not fully effective and requires improvement. Managers observe activities to assess the quality of teaching and learning, but do not focus sufficiently on the progress the learner is making. Action plans arising from observations do not contain sufficient detail for staff to use to develop their own skills

effectively. Managers do not link these action plans to staff annual appraisals sufficiently well to monitor and evaluate their main job role.

- The continual professional development of staff is good. Staff are vocational experts and all have relevant training and education or assessment qualifications. Staff who visit workplaces are appropriately health and safety qualified to check that learners are in safe placements. Managers provide regular and effective in-house training, including equality and diversity, safeguarding and functional skills.
- The self-assessment process is thorough and includes all staff, although subcontractors and other stakeholders are under-represented. The process identifies key strengths, but few areas for development. Managers are insufficiently critical and do not evaluate the impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment systematically enough. The current quality improvement plan is perfunctory and requires improvement to act as a robust management tool capable of driving forward key developments in an expanding provision.
- Managers analyse data regularly and thoroughly to identify which learner groups are more successful than others. Senior managers and directors are well informed and use data effectively to set and monitor targets for improvement. Actions to address any learner underperformance are effective and learners are well supported to achieve their qualifications.
- The curriculum meets the needs of learners, employers and the region well. Traineeships provide learners not yet ready for apprenticeships with valuable work experience in electrical wholesalers and with arboriculture specialists at a local country park. The majority of these trainees progress successfully to apprenticeship or employment. New intermediate apprenticeships in fire detection and intruder alarm systems provide learners with valuable, in-demand skills and an advanced programme is planned to offer higher skills development. Staff develop learners' employability and citizenship skills particularly well. Apprentices undertake additional qualifications, such as first aid, to enhance their skills and experience. Learners show good mathematical skills in their workplaces, but staff do not develop learners' use of vocational English skills sufficiently well.
- Directors and managers promote equality and diversity well. On-going training provides clear direction and procedures to follow, so that learners and staff are treated inclusively and with respect irrespective of culture, belief, gender, sexuality or background. A variety of external specialists provide effective staff training; staff understand their role in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity. Learners know their rights and responsibilities and how to seek help should they need it.
- Safeguarding of learners is good. Managers ensure that learners are safe using effective health and safety and recruitment procedures. Staff and subcontractors have undertaken relevant safeguarding training, know how to access support for learners and have good links with the local children's safeguarding board. New staff are routinely supervised until relevant disclosure and barring checks are completed. Safeguarding and health and safety are standing agenda items on every senior management and board meeting, so that any arising issues are dealt with swiftly. The chair of the board is made aware of any safeguarding issues immediately. Staff are aware of the 'Prevent' agenda to promote fundamental British values, such as freedom of speech, tolerance and democracy, and training for staff is planned now that relevant regional training has been conducted.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Focus Training (SW) Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
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
Health and social care	2
Hospitality and catering	2
Service enterprises	2
Administration	2
Business management	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1453							
Principal/CEO	Jamie Rail							
Date of previous inspection	September 2011							
Website address	www.focus4training.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+
	-	269	-	233	-	53	-	15
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	102	324	124	297	-	29		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	6		1		7			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	-							
Part-time	-							
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	410							
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"> ■ Venus Training and Consultancy ■ Plymouth Training and Consultancy 							

Contextual information

Focus Training (SW) Limited was established as Focus Training in March 1999, becoming a limited company in 2009. DCET Training, formerly known as Devon & Cornwall Electrical Training, is a specialist electrical training provider and was established in 1995 by electrical contractors in the region to deliver advanced apprenticeships in the electro-technical sector. In 2011, Focus joined forces with DCET Training in Exeter and formally joined their Skills Funding Agency (SFA) contracts on 1 August 2013. Working closely together has helped the organisation to increase its offer, both geographically in Exeter, Redruth and Plymouth, and for the range of training it can provide. The provision includes: intermediate, advanced and higher apprenticeships; work-based learning; short courses; employability courses and traineeships. Around a third of the health and social care provision is subcontracted to another specialist provider.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Barry Barrett-Mold

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing 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. Inspectors 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 relevant 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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