

Focus Training & Development Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

1–4 November 2016

Overall effectiveness		Inadequate	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate	Adult learning programmes	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate	Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate		
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Managers with responsibility for safeguarding have insufficient experience, qualifications or access to information to have an adequate oversight of the safety of all learners.
- Governance is inadequate; leaders have failed to establish suitable arrangements for objective scrutiny or challenge of their own work to ensure that they are held to account, and to reverse the decline in the quality of provision and outcomes for learners.
- Leadership of all aspects of learners' programmes is inadequate and fails to lead to achievements for learners. Quality assurance arrangements, including for the subcontracted provision, are ineffective.
- Leaders have an over-optimistic view of the performance of the provider, because of unreliable information about the progress and achievements of learners and apprentices.
- Assessors' qualifications and experience are insufficient to meet the requirements of all apprenticeships; as a result, a significant minority of apprentices are at risk of failure.
- Apprentices do not receive their entitlement to off-the-job training.
- Employers have insufficient involvement in planning apprentices' programmes because managers do not communicate with them effectively.
- Teaching, learning and assessment on the vast majority of apprentices' programmes are not sufficiently challenging and, as a result, too many apprentices do not make sufficiently good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of apprentices who progress to, or remain in, sustained employment after they complete their apprenticeship is too low.
- Adult learners receive insufficient initial advice and guidance to inform them about the most appropriate programme of study to meet their needs, or the support they need to cope with the demands of their course; as a result, too many withdraw in the early stages.
- Too many of the adults who follow employability programmes do not gain the work-related skills they need to find and remain in employment.
- Leaders and managers have taken insufficient action to reduce significant differences in the achievement of particular groups of learners.

The provider has the following strengths

- The inspection team found no key strengths.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Based in Darlington, Focus Training & Development Ltd (FTD) provides apprenticeships across England, with the main concentrations of apprentices being in the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and London regions. FTD provides employability programmes for unemployed adults, although no programmes were running during the week of the inspection. Through a subcontractor, FTD delivers level 3 adult learning programmes in London. Learners fund their participation on these programmes by taking out advanced learning loans.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Without delay, leaders must introduce clear policies and arrangements for ensuring that all learners and apprentices are kept safe. Leaders should ensure that apprentices' employment status and work locations are known. They should ensure that all safeguarding disclosures and incidents of bullying and harassment are recorded and dealt with appropriately, and that learners and apprentices are aware of and protected from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- As a matter of urgency, leaders must establish appropriate and robust mechanisms for the governance of FTD so that the managing director and other leaders are held to account for the quality of provision and outcomes for learners, and to ensure that they take action quickly to make improvements.
- Leaders must improve the effectiveness of the leadership of all aspects of learners' and apprentices' programmes. They should introduce robust quality improvement processes across all aspects of provision to identify weaknesses quickly and accurately, and to establish clear plans to bring about rapid improvement.
- Leaders must improve the subcontractor's inadequate adult learning provision by:
 - monitoring the quality of provision and staff performance closely, and taking action to ensure that managers improve the provision rapidly
 - ensuring that adult learners receive high-quality advice and guidance that result in these learners following appropriate programmes, and that support for learners, particularly those who speak English as an additional language, is of high quality.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that information about learners' and apprentices' progress, experiences on programmes and achievements is accurate, and that they use this information effectively to:
 - make judgements about the quality of provision
 - identify differences in achievement between various groups and the reasons why these exist, and take steps to eradicate these differences and improve outcomes for all learners and apprentices.

- Leaders should ensure that assessors who work with apprentices have sufficient qualifications and experience to develop apprentices' skills effectively and meet awarding body requirements.
- Leaders should ensure that employers are routinely involved in the planning and delivery of all aspects of apprentices' training programmes. They should ensure that programmes are sufficiently challenging for apprentices and equip them well for their future careers, and that training enables apprentices to provide a worthwhile contribution to their employers' businesses.
- Leaders and assessors must review the apprenticeship provision to ensure that a much higher proportion of apprentices achieve their qualifications and remain in work when they finish their programmes. They should make sure that apprentices receive their entitlement to high-quality on- and off-the-job training that challenges them, builds on their starting points and enables them to develop new skills and knowledge.
- Leaders must improve the proportion of learners on employability programmes that progress to employment when they complete their course. They should review all employability programmes to ensure that these meet learners' needs and ambitions and provide them with the work-related skills that they need to be successful.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders have presided over the deterioration of the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Weak leadership has resulted in a lack of oversight of the performance of all aspects of the business including that delivered by subcontractors. Too many learners and apprentices do not receive a good quality of education and training, including their entitlement to off-the-job learning.
- The decision by senior managers to enter into an informal arrangement with another training provider, which has recently ceased trading, has had a negative effect on their ability to maintain necessary operational functions such as having suitably skilled and qualified staff to deliver apprenticeships.
- Managers do not plan well for current business and operational aspects and for the future development of provision. They place too much focus on the achievement of financial targets to the detriment of improving the quality of teaching and learning. They do not identify any strategic or operational priorities to improve the quality of provision.
- Leaders' management of the quality of staff's work is ineffective, and required improvements to performance are not being realised. The majority of targets set in annual appraisals of assessors' work are superficial and fail to identify clearly what aspects of performance they need to improve.
- When judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment during lesson observations, managers focus too much on what assessors do rather than the learning and progress of apprentices. Managers fail to provide developmental feedback to assessors following observations and do not set specific actions or targets to help assessors improve.
- Managers' self-assessment of the effectiveness of all aspects of FTD's provision is over-optimistic and fails to identify many of the significant weaknesses. In their quality improvement plans, they do not identify clear actions or targets to improve. The plans are perfunctory and imprecise, and they fail to demonstrate that appropriate arrangements are in place to improve the quality of teaching and learning swiftly.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that reliable information is available to inform them about the progress and achievements of learners and apprentices. Staff record that apprentices have completed their programme successfully when they do not have the required evidence to support this. Leaders have failed to recognise or challenge this and, as a result, have an over-optimistic view about apprentices' achievements.
- Leaders and managers have no arrangements in place to monitor the quality of provision delivered by the subcontractor or to bring about improvements. They are unaware of the poor experiences of many adult learners and the slow progress that too many of them make. Records of learners enrolled, of those attending classes and those who have left their courses differ significantly between FTD and the subcontractor.

- Leaders and managers have been unsuccessful in meeting the needs of the employers they work with and the skills priorities in the regions where they work. Many employers are looking for alternative provision for their apprentices owing to their dissatisfaction with FTD.
- Curriculum planning is inadequate. Leaders have failed to ensure that apprentices receive their entitlement to well-planned off-the-job learning. Managers do not ensure that assessors plan to develop apprentices' skills in English and mathematics and, as a result, the majority of apprentices do not develop these skills well enough.
- FTD's leaders and managers do not routinely monitor or take action to identify the reasons for significant differences between the achievements of particular groups of learners, or put sufficient actions in place to eradicate these.
- Managers have appropriate policies to promote equality and celebrate diversity through discussions between assessors and learners in progress reviews. However, they do not provide assessors with support or training to enable them to relate these discussions to learners' personal experiences or their work.

The governance of the provider

- Governance of FTD is inadequate. Leaders have failed to establish any arrangements for governance of the provision. As a result, no mechanisms exist for the work of leaders to be sufficiently scrutinised, or for them to be challenged or held to account for the decline in the quality of provision and outcomes for learners since the previous inspection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are ineffective.
- The designated safeguarding lead and her deputy have not received appropriate training to prepare them for their role. Managers do not have sufficient oversight of the safety and well-being of all learners. They do not always appropriately record and follow up disclosures or incidents of bullying and harassment. The current employment status and whereabouts of a small minority of apprentices are unknown to staff and managers because of weak management of data.
- Managers with responsibility for safeguarding have insufficient links with other agencies in the localities where FTD works. They do not receive information on local issues to inform their safeguarding strategy.
- Managers have implemented training only very recently for staff in the 'Prevent' duty and risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Learners and apprentices have a limited awareness about these risks, and this is based on their personal experiences rather than through FTD's input.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching, learning and assessment fail to meet learners' and apprentices' needs. As a result, adult learners and apprentices make insufficient progress from their starting points.

- Employers' involvement in planning training and assessment activities is inadequate. As a result, apprentices make slow progress in developing the new skills and knowledge that they need to be successful in their workplace. In addition, assessors provide insufficient off-the-job training for apprentices and are not aware that this training is a requirement of apprentices' programmes.
- Employer involvement is more structured and effective in the 'combat to construction' initiative aimed at providing ex-military personnel with construction skills and qualifications. However, apprentices in plastering, painting and decoration, built environment design and local environmental services are unable to gain sufficient technical skills because staff do not have the relevant qualifications, training or vocational expertise to teach these subjects. As a result, they are unlikely to achieve their qualifications.
- Assessment practices do not promote learning. Assessors' feedback on marked work does not accurately identify what learners and apprentices have achieved and what they need to do to improve. In too many situations, assessments take place towards the end of courses. As a result, they place unnecessary pressure on learners and apprentices.
- Initial advice and guidance provided to both adult learners and apprentices are too often inappropriate and misleading. Too many learners join courses or apprenticeships that are unsuitable, given their existing skill levels and career aspirations.
- Staff do not use assessments well enough at the start of courses to identify what adult learners and apprentices can already do to enable them to plan and provide suitable training activities. Staff agree learning targets with learners and apprentices following assessment and during progress reviews, but these lack sufficient challenge or detail to help learners to build on the skills they have gained.
- Managers do not track the progress of learners and apprentices with sufficient care or rigour. They record information inaccurately and present an overly positive view of current progress. As a result of this weak monitoring, too many learners and apprentices are not on track to complete their qualifications within the planned timescale.
- In many cases, apprentices' assessors have changed multiple times, leading to extended gaps between visits. Apprentices are confused about what they should be doing to make progress. Managers lack awareness of which apprentices are making slow progress and are therefore unable to put actions in place to help apprentices get back on track.
- Support provided by staff to enable and encourage learners and apprentices to improve their English and mathematical skills is inadequate. Staff do not have the competence or qualifications to teach English and mathematics functional skills. They do not routinely help learners or apprentices to improve their writing effectively by, for example, correcting spelling errors appropriately in written work. No arrangements exist to allow adult learners and apprentices who are capable of studying GCSE courses in English and mathematics to do so.

Arrangements to provide additional support and help for learners and apprentices who require or would benefit from these are ineffective. Too many adult learners and apprentices do not receive the additional help they need. As a result, they make slower progress and achieve less well than their peers. This is particularly the case for adult learners who speak English as an additional language who are following programmes with the subcontractor.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

- Adult learners who have had long breaks from participating in learning gain in confidence during the early stages of their learning programmes. However, this is quickly undermined by the slow progress they make in achieving qualifications, which prevents them from being able to fulfil their ambitions to gain employment or progress to further learning.
- FTD's assessors and leaders do not collect sufficient or accurate information about learners' or apprentices' attendance or punctuality to take action where these are poor.
- The provision of careers information, advice and guidance is inadequate. Many apprentices are recruited through associate recruiters who sell apprenticeships to employers rather than recruiting apprentices based on a sound initial assessment of their starting points, job role or career aspirations.
- Adult learners receive insufficient initial advice and guidance to inform them about the most appropriate programme of study to meet their needs. A significant minority join courses that are too challenging for them. They receive insufficient support to cope with the demands of their courses. As a result, too many withdraw from their courses in the early stages.
- A high proportion of apprentices have good attitudes to their work. However, they develop these through their day-to-day work with their employers rather than through planned training and assessment activities delivered by FTD's assessors.
- Too few unemployed adults gain the skills that employers value. As a result, the proportion of these learners who obtain employment is low.
- Apprentices and learners start their programmes with very varied levels of understanding of extremism, radicalisation, how to stay safe online and what makes a good citizen in modern Britain. Induction activities include conversations that cover these, but staff do not encourage learners sufficiently to consider these topics in the context of their own learning and job roles. As a result, learners' knowledge and attitudes about these important aspects of living today remain largely unchanged throughout their time with FTD.

Outcomes for learners

Inadequate

- In too many cases, apprentices' programmes are not sufficiently challenging. FTD provides minimal planned training activity to enable apprentices to develop new skills and knowledge. Apprentices are assessed only on how well they can demonstrate existing skills to assessors. As a result, too many apprentices do not make sufficiently good progress, given their starting points.
- The provider's own data for apprentices' achievements in 2015/16 is unreliable. Although improved on the previous year, the proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification in 2014/15 remained too low.
- Adult learners and apprentices make too little progress in improving their English and mathematical skills. Staff do not adequately assess their starting points in these subjects, and subsequently fail to plan and provide sufficient learning activities and specialist support. As a result, too few learners achieve qualifications in English or mathematics.

- The proportion of adults on employability programmes who find sustained employment as a result of their participation is too low. Managers do not have access to sufficiently accurate destination data to plan or target improvements.
- The proportion of apprentices who remain in sustained employment when they complete their apprenticeships is too low.
- At the time of the inspection, no adults taking level 3 qualifications with the subcontractor had achieved their qualification. Data held by FTD, and that provided by the subcontractor, covering withdrawals and learners' progress, are contradictory. A significant minority of the learners contacted by inspectors said that they had left their courses, although the subcontractor still recorded them as attending.
- Significant differences exist between the achievements of particular groups of apprentices. In 2014/15, those from White British backgrounds achieved significantly better than their peers from other backgrounds. Male apprentices achieved significantly better than females. Apprentices who have an identified learning difficulty and/or disability achieved less well than their peers. The provider's own data for 2015/16 is not sufficiently reliable to confirm whether any of these differences have either reduced or grown.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Inadequate

- Provision for adult learners eligible for advanced learning loans is organised through a subcontracting arrangement with another provider. Currently, 55 learners follow programmes leading to level 3 qualifications in business and management, health and social care, travel and tourism, and information and communication technology (ICT). FTD also provides employability programmes for adults, although no learners were on courses at the time of the inspection.
- Adult learners taking level 3 qualifications make slow progress. No learners who have reached their planned completion date so far have achieved their qualification. Although a minority of learners, particularly those who have not participated in learning for a considerable time, improve their confidence initially, they do not achieve the vocational knowledge and employability skills necessary to enable them to advance their career aspirations.
- Staff's planning of teaching, learning and assessment does not meet the differing needs of individual learners or enable them to make the progress of which they are capable. Staff set insufficiently detailed or clear targets for learners. Learners are vague about the structure of their programmes and many have yet to be supplied with a detailed programme of planned learning activities.
- Initial advice and guidance fail to inform learners adequately about the content or demands of qualifications. A significant minority of learners enrol on programmes that are unsuitable for their needs and starting points. As a result, too many learners withdraw early from their studies.

- Support to develop learners' oral and written language skills is inadequate. This is particularly the case for learners who speak English as an additional language. This reduces learners' ability to progress in their studies or improve the skills that would help them gain work.
- Staff do not track learners' progress effectively and accurately. Learners are not set targets for completion and resubmission of assignment work. Consequently, they have little understanding of the progress they are making.
- Assessment of learners' work is often weak and inaccurate. Teachers' written feedback on assignments does not help learners to improve their written work.
- FTD's leaders and managers have inadequate oversight of the subcontracted provision. Appropriate quality assurance processes are not in place and managers do not have access to reliable data relating to attendance and retention of learners. Managers are not aware of the poor experiences of learners on these programmes.

Apprenticeships

Inadequate

- A total of 279 apprentices of all ages are studying apprenticeships with FTD. Approximately four fifths are adults. Around half are taking intermediate apprenticeships, just under a third are on advanced apprenticeships and the remainder are on higher level apprenticeships. Apprentices follow programmes in cleaning and support services, facilities management, warehousing and distribution, business administration, management, customer service, team leading, built environment design, construction maintenance, plastering, trowel occupations and wood occupations.
- Management of apprenticeships is characterised by poor communication. Liaison and consultation with employers are inadequate. Managers and staff rarely involve employers in planning apprenticeships. Employers are unclear as to how they can support their apprentices in the workplace. FTD's assessors, employers and apprentices are unaware of the full requirements of apprenticeships, including the requirement for planned off-the-job learning. As a result of these weaknesses, apprentices make slow progress and too many are not on track to complete their qualifications.
- Too many apprentices leave their programmes early. The proportion that progress to higher level apprenticeships, further study and employment is low. Managers are not aware of the destinations of too many apprentices.
- Construction apprentices, who represent a minority, have day- or block release planned into their programmes for off-the-job learning. However, FTD does not have sufficient staff with the necessary qualifications and experience to train these apprentices.
- Managers have failed to recruit or retain sufficiently skilled assessors to deliver the current range of apprenticeships or undertake sufficiently frequent workplace visits. Assessors frequently cancel planned visits. These factors contribute further to the slow progress of many apprentices.
- Staff provide inappropriate initial advice and guidance and their initial assessment of apprentices' starting points, job roles and career aspirations is weak. As a result, too many apprentices follow inappropriate programmes. For many, these programmes are not sufficiently challenging and, in a few cases, irrelevant to their job.

- Assessors agree targets with apprentices in their individual learning plans which are weak, lack aspiration and challenge, and relate only to the completion of qualification units.
- Tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress by assessors and managers lack rigour. Frequent staff changes have contributed to a lack of consistency in data used by managers to monitor apprenticeship provision.
- In a minority of assessment and review visits, assessors ask probing questions that effectively check apprentices' understanding. Written feedback, in contrast, is weak and does not clearly indicate to apprentices how they can improve and make progress.
- Assessors plan and provide insufficient learning activities, or support for those who require it, to enable apprentices to improve their skills in English, mathematics and ICT.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58519
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	959
Principal/CEO	Kully Brooks
Telephone number	01325 355633
Website	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 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	–	–	–	–	–	55	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	38	101	7	74	–	59		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	Aspire Education Consultants UK Ltd							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the management information systems and funding manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Malcolm Fraser, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Cocker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Merry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Bev Cross	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Pullen	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016