

Focus Training Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

20–25 April 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The proportion of learners who complete their courses in the planned time is low.
- Trainers and tutors do not use learners' existing skills and knowledge to plan their teaching; consequently, too many learners do not achieve their full potential.
- Managers have not developed effective quality improvement arrangements; as a result, the quality of teaching and learning has declined.
- Staff do not collect and use reliable data on the time that learners spend on their distance learning activities to improve quality.
- Board members have not supported and challenged senior managers sufficiently because the information that they receive about the quality of the provision is not accurate.
- Trainers and tutors do not develop learners' English and mathematical skills sufficiently.
- Too many trainers and tutors are not confident about extending learners' understanding of British values.
- Managers' roles and responsibilities are not clear; consequently, issues requiring improvement are not identified and resolved swiftly enough.
- Many learners are not sufficiently aware of the signs of radicalisation and extremism and how they may relate to their work.

The provider has the following strengths

- The majority of learners who complete their programmes start their own businesses or progress onto relevant courses.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Learners enjoy their practical training from well-experienced trainers.
- Learners benefit from good, regular tutor telephone contact that they find very helpful.
- Managers and trainers have developed good working partnerships with health and fitness organisations.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Focus Training Limited (Focus Training), established in 2000, operates from Bolton, Lancashire. The company delivers courses in health and fitness in centres in Brighton, Birmingham, Crawley, Liverpool, London, Manchester and York. The structure of the programmes for the vast majority of learners consists of distance learning, full-day teaching and training sessions and telephone support. The company employs 25 staff, five of whom are directors. Additionally, around 26 trainers and tutors are contracted to offer teaching, training and assessment sessions, as and when required.
- Approximately half of learners pay fees for their courses; the rest use advanced learner loans and the latter group of learners are the focus of this inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who complete their programmes in the planned time by:
 - ensuring that trainers and tutors use an assessment of learners' starting points to set them clear, specific and challenging targets for completing different elements of their programmes, monitoring and recording learners' progress against these targets
 - ensuring that learners who fall behind are identified quickly and are supported well to catch up and make good progress.
- Develop and implement an effective quality improvement arrangement to raise the standard of teaching, training, learning and assessment by:
 - focusing the observation of teaching and training sessions on learning and learners' development in order to identify good practice and improve weak teaching practices
 - defining clear roles and responsibilities for managers for making improvements and supporting and challenging them to make effective changes
 - ensuring that the information held in the e-portfolio system for individual learners is comprehensive and accurate so that learners can gain a clear understanding of what they need to do to complete in time.
- Collect accurate and reliable information about all aspects of learners' learning and training, especially the time that learners spend on distance learning, and use it to ensure that the programmes are planned to reflect individual learners' experiences and career plans.
- Develop and implement an effective policy to improve learners' English and mathematical skills.
- Ensure that all trainers and tutors are knowledgeable and confident to extend learners' understanding of radicalisation and extremism as it relates to learners' job roles, so that learners are more aware of how to protect themselves.
- Develop and implement effective arrangements for the board members to provide challenge and support for leaders and senior managers in order to improve the quality of the provision.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Focus Training was awarded its own contract just over two years ago. This was after many years of subcontracting with another provider. Since operating this contract, the board of directors, leaders and senior managers have been slow in developing the company's policies and practices to ensure that they provide high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the quality of the provision has declined.
- Quality improvement arrangements, although comprehensive, do not provide managers with an accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment. Managers observe a wide range of teaching and support activities that trainers and tutors offer. However, their findings are often inaccurate because they do not focus sufficiently on learners' skill development and their learning and progress. When they identify weaknesses, it is not clear how the improvement actions are agreed with trainers and tutors and who is accountable for improvement as their roles and responsibilities are not defined well enough.
- Learners' programmes are made up of a significant amount of distance learning, a number of teaching and training days and telephone support. Managers have not developed clear and effective arrangements to ensure that learners' experience and background is taken into account in planning different elements of their programmes. For example, learners with little experience of sports science are allocated the same time for self-study as more experienced learners. Consequently, learners do not achieve their full potential.
- Managers do not have accurate information about the length of time that individual learners spend on the different parts of their courses, for example the time that they spend on the self-study element of their programmes. Consequently, managers cannot evaluate accurately learners' development and intervene to improve learners' progress quickly enough.
- Leaders have not ensured that all staff have clear performance targets that are measurable and focus on learners' experience. As a result, managers cannot identify and improve staff performance issues swiftly and support and challenge them to carry out improvements.
- Managers have not developed and implemented a clear policy for improving learners' skills in English and mathematics to enhance further their job prospects. For example, they have not implemented arrangements to check learners' starting points in English, mathematics and information and communication technology.
- Managers have not been successful enough in ensuring that all trainers and tutors are confident to prepare learners better for life and work in modern Britain. As a result, trainers and tutors do not extend sufficiently learners' understanding of democratic values, tolerance and respect for different beliefs and groups. Managers have recognised that the extensive course material that they have developed and that learners use does not reflect fully the diverse culture of learners' future clients. For example, the learning resources do not include clients who have disabilities or who are from minority ethnic groups.

- Staff have developed very good links with a wide range of employers in the health and fitness sector. They work with employers well to make changes to the courses to enhance learners' skills so that learners become more-productive employees.

The governance of the provider

- The oversight, support and the challenge that the board members provide require improvement.
- The board receives regularly a wide range of information about learners' performance and the quality of teaching and training that trainers and tutors offer. However, too often this information is inaccurate, for example where it relates to the quality of lessons. This hampers the board members' determination to improve the provision. Consequently, the pace of improvements has been slow.
- Most recently, the board has made significant changes to its membership and practices. For example, it has recruited a member with good experience of teaching, learning and assessment. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of these changes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and actions taken are appropriate to safeguard adult learners who undertake a very significant proportion of their course as distance learning.
- Trainers and tutors have a clear understanding of how to keep adult learners safe and help them to be vigilant in respect of their own safety, for example in sports venues. Managers have appropriate links with external agencies to support staff training and provide guidance if required. Regular telephone support for learners provides strong support if learners have concerns.
- Managers carry out appropriate checks on trainers and tutors before recruitment and keep detailed records. Staff have completed appropriate training on protecting learners from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. However, managers have not ensured that trainers and tutors are skilful enough to extend further learners' knowledge of any radicalisation and extremism that they may encounter in their work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Trainers and tutors do not use an assessment of learners' starting points to plan their teaching sufficiently. They do not discuss and set learners clear and challenging learning targets to match learners' potential and career aspirations in the health and fitness sector. Too often, they set tasks and activities for all learners regardless of learners' abilities and previous experiences. Consequently, the most able learners do not extend sufficiently their knowledge and learners who struggle fall behind.
- Trainers and tutors focus too narrowly on meeting the minimum requirements and standards that learners are required to achieve. They do not check learners' depth of understanding well enough to ensure that learners can apply theoretical knowledge to

practical work. As a result, learners do not develop the analytical skills that they need when working independently in the fitness sector.

- On too many occasions, trainers and tutors move too quickly from topics without ensuring that learners have a good understanding of them. A minority of tutors, when checking learners' work through telephone conversations, do not explain clearly learners' mistakes or misunderstandings before moving to the next question. Trainers and tutors do not plan sufficiently to ensure that learners enhance their interpersonal and communication skills to be successful in their careers, for example in sports coaching that requires clients to be inspired to stay on their health plans.
- Learners have a good understanding of planning exercises to reflect the needs of groups of individuals based upon age, gender and disability. However, trainers do not develop learners' knowledge and understanding of the broader issues that they may encounter when working as a personal trainer in Britain, for example ethical and cultural preferences.
- Learners are confident, motivated and articulate, particularly when carrying out practical activities. They improve their awareness and understanding of industry-related terminology well. However, trainers do not pay sufficient attention to checking learners' spellings of specialist terminology, for example in anatomy and physiology.
- Learners receive sufficient feedback from their well-informed trainers and tutors to meet the requirements of their qualifications. Written feedback to learners on face-to-face assessment and training sessions is detailed and supportive and enables learners to make further progress. However, tutors do not ensure that learners have successfully used the feedback to complete identified gaps in their learning.
- Learners complete good work-related activities as part of their level 3 and level 4 programmes. They complete a detailed and comprehensive work-related project that includes working with clients with at least two physical conditions, for example lower back pain and cardiovascular problems. Learners analyse well the client's needs and physical condition, diet and lifestyle and produce and implement an exercise plan to help resolve the client's difficulties. Learners implement their plan with the clients in a fitness centre; the plan and its implementation are assessed well by trainers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- The majority of learners have insufficient understanding of the risks of extremism and the issues that they may encounter in the workplace and when working with clients.
- Too many learners are not encouraged to extend their understanding of British values to be even better prepared to work and prosper in modern Britain.
- Learners do not improve their skills in English and mathematics sufficiently that they can, for example, write detailed and high-standard health and fitness plans.
- Learners benefit from good initial advice and guidance that enable them to understand the content of their qualifications, the methods used for teaching and assessing their skills and the structure of their programmes. However, not all learners receive sufficient information about potential career opportunities for after completing their programmes.
- Learners enhance further their good work ethic and become very self-assured. They are

very committed to their programmes and most learners take good responsibility for their own learning.

- Learners develop a good standard of fitness and exercise related skills. They exhibit high levels of confidence to apply their skills, for example in planning with clients the use of recumbent cycle, treadmill and resistance machines in order to improve cardiovascular fitness and build muscle.
- Learners' attendance during all parts of their programmes is high. Staff follow up attendance issues promptly.
- Learners feel safe and can explain what to do if they have any safeguarding concerns. They have a good understanding of health and safety while using exercise machines. They know how to recognise workplace hazards and risks, particularly in gyms and other fitness settings.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The majority of current learners progress at a reasonable pace towards completing their qualifications. In 2015/16, the proportion who achieved within their planned time was low. The most able learners do not fulfil their potential because trainers and tutors do not challenge them well enough.
- Managers do not have sufficiently reliable information about the performance of different groups of learners. The information about the progress and achievements of learners in different geographical regions requires further development.
- Most learners produce a standard of work that meets the requirements of the awarding organisation and, as a result, they achieve their qualifications. Too few learners produce a good or outstanding standard of work.
- Managers have developed good arrangements to monitor learners' progression. The vast majority of learners improve their prospects at work, start new businesses or join higher-level courses.
- Learners enjoy their programmes and the support that they receive. They are very complimentary about the tutors, who support them through regular telephone calls.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51873
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	112
Managing director	Bob Ellis
Telephone number	01204 388330
Website	www.focus-training.com

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+
	–	–	–	–	–	269	–	10
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
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:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality 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

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