

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 July 2018

Mr Jamie Rail
Managing Director
Focus Training (South West)
Suite B
Valley House
Valley Road
Plymouth
PL7 1RF

Dear Mr Rail

Short inspection of Focus Training (SW) Limited

Following the short inspection on 14 and 15 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection of the apprenticeship provision carried out since the provider was judged to be good in April 2015.

This provider continues to be good.

Your leaders and managers at Focus Training (SW) Limited (Focus) have managed and mitigated changes in the business environment well. Your continued approach to working closely with a very wide range of small and large-scale employers across the South West of England is proving successful. Feedback indicates that many employers regard Focus as a high-quality training partner. Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have worked hard and not been complacent in bringing about further improvements. For example, substantial investment in new industry-standard resources for off-the-job training facilities throughout the South West adds considerably to the training offer now available for learners.

The range of courses on offer has been reviewed and also expanded. For example, an arboriculture programme has been reinstated recently. It is very encouraging to see the high motivation and rapid progress of this new cohort of learners. While the proportion of electrical learners has risen significantly since the previous inspection, the number of business administration and health and social care learners has decreased. Regardless of what route learners choose, Focus staff pay very good attention to ensuring that all are helped to achieve to the best of their ability.

Learners enjoy their programmes and most are making good progress. Assessors and instructors make a strong contribution to each learner's learning, their skills development and the achievement of high standards. Learners' work environments

are good and the great majority of employers provide learners with good opportunities for learning and development. Managers provide good support to learners who are identified as being at risk of not completing their programme or falling behind for personal or professional reasons. Managers, staff and learners identify such learners quickly and provide effective practical support and as a result the learners tend to remain on their programmes.

Managers recognise that, while the provision remains good, there are some aspects that still need to be improved. They also recognise that they have not been successful in improving all aspects of the provision. Nevertheless, managers are very receptive to external advice or guidance and quick to implement improved ways of working.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements remain fit for purpose and appropriate action is taken to safeguard all learners. Focus's governing board, leaders and managers place all aspects of learners' safety at the core of their work. They have ensured that procedures related to the safeguarding of learners are comprehensive and thorough. As a result, learners are safe and know how to report concerns. Learners are confident that staff will act appropriately to investigate and resolve any worries.

Appropriate, trained, designated safeguarding staff are in place, including at Focus's sole subcontractor. Managers keep up-to-date records of staff qualifications, references, training and Disclosure and Barring Service checks, although these are not yet available in a single file. Almost all new and existing Focus staff have received effective training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty and have a good understanding of these aspects; training for the remainder of staff is scheduled for July 2018.

Learners are safe at work and have a very good understanding of practical and theoretical health and safety practice. Learners ensure that they use their personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly. Arboriculture learners are particularly aware of the risks involved in their work, for example when using chainsaws at ground level and at height. A Focus manager has conducted a thorough risk assessment of all Focus's training facilities, has further developed health and safety processes and has introduced enhanced PPE.

Inspection findings

This short inspection involved 10 lines of enquiry, including the safeguarding of learners. Seven lines of enquiry were based on areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

- My first line of enquiry reviewed whether learners' success rates have further improved since the previous inspection and whether the number leaving early has reduced. In the past three full contract years, learners' success rates in all

subject areas have remained high and around two thirds of all learners are completing their programmes in the time specified. However, although managers are implementing effective strategies to ensure that learners complete their programmes successfully, they have not been able to increase success rates across all programmes further. This is due in part to the negative impact of taking on underperforming learners from a failed provider.

- In the current year so far, learners' overall success rates in electrical programmes have remained high, but they are currently lower than in previous years for health and social care and business administration learners.
- Learners on the arboriculture programme can clearly articulate and demonstrate the skills they have learned since they started their programme, for example using cross-cutting techniques, felling trees and cleaning and reassembling chainsaw bars correctly. Business administration learners have improved their personal and professional confidence in the workplace and many now respond to customers' queries accurately and with ease. Current health and social care learners are making good progress, and a few have completed their programme early. These learners know how to record medication accurately and how best to work with dementia clients, and allow clients to make their own choices. Most electrical learners are making the progress expected of them, and a small minority are progressing ahead of schedule. The quality of electrical learners' work is high and meets the rigorous standards set by architects or clerks of works. Employers value electrical learners' rapid skills development, which has a positive impact on their businesses.
- My second line of enquiry reviewed whether learners continue to receive particularly good support from well-qualified, vocationally skilled and experienced training staff and employers. Training staff and teachers are highly skilled and experienced, providing learners with valued technical, personal and professional training. Assessors are quick to identify any individual's barriers to learning and work hard to resolve challenges. Employers recognise and respect the high quality of the Focus instructors and assessors and their positive impact on learners' skills development, standards of work and behaviours. Most employers work closely with Focus staff to ensure that learners have good opportunities to gain the skills they need at work. However, some electrical learners do not have an agreed training plan in their workplace, and their employers do not routinely provide the broad range of skills and knowledge development to complement the programme of off-the-job training.
- My third line of enquiry reviewed how well Focus managers are working with its subcontractor. Focus managers now only work in partnership with one subcontractor, Plymouth Training and Consultancy Limited, a specialist health and social care provider. The working relationship is productive, and the combined skills available across the two organisations are mutually beneficial. A Focus manager holds regular formal meetings with the subcontractor to monitor the quality of the provision, and these have helped to promote improvements over time.
- My fourth line of enquiry reviewed whether specific targets for the development of learners' broader employability skills were included in targets set by trainers

and assessors. Health and social care assessors set clear and specific learning goals for learners at each visit. These learners make good progress because they are highly motivated and know what they need to achieve. Off-the-job-trainers set clear targets for electrical learners, reflecting feedback from assessment, employers, supervisors and the outcomes of discussions with learners during progress reviews. The targets set for business administration learners are too general and not being used to develop learners' employability skills or knowledge well enough. Consequently, their progress is less strong.

- My fifth line of enquiry reviewed the effectiveness of staff training to support and develop the English language skills of all learners. Managers identify that this remains an aspect requiring improvement because there is still too much variation in how well learners' language skills are being developed. For example, electrical learners' language and communication skills are developed well because they are routinely expected to explain and justify their findings or calculations to their peers. All the health and social care learners we interviewed reported that their assessors had helped them to improve their English language skills well, which had helped many to improve their communication with colleagues and clients. However, some trainers and assessors, particularly in business administration and arboriculture, do not develop learners' English language skills beyond the minimum levels required for their programmes.
- My sixth line of enquiry reviewed the quality and impact of careers guidance for learners aged 16 to 18, and any adults with education, health and care plans. Focus managers provide useful careers advice and guidance to prospective young learners and at the time of their recruitment. A qualified member of subcontractor staff provides careers advice to health and social care learners once a week. Most assessors and instructors use their industry knowledge and skills well to help learners understand the career paths and options in their chosen fields of work. Electrical learners develop a good understanding of what they want to do as they progress in their apprenticeship. Many want to run their own businesses. Arboriculture learners are highly motivated and many are now planning to go on to higher- level qualifications.
- My seventh line of enquiry reviewed whether the resources provided on the virtual learning environment (VLE) are now being used well by all learners, for example to develop their study skills and enable them to take practice tests. Most learners now use the virtual learning environment well, but there is room for further improvement. Health and social care learners enjoy using Focus's online systems to check on their progress. Electrical learners value the VLE and use it to send in work and catch up on missed work, and for revision and access to test papers. Too few business administration learners use the VLE, and those who do are not fully aware of its resources.
- My eighth line of enquiry reviewed how well the observation of teaching, learning and assessment (OTLA) focuses on learners' learning, and whether teaching staff now receive more detailed feedback after each observation to help improve their practice. Managers' feedback to teaching staff is now generally perceptive and constructive but observers still focus too little on the impact of teaching on learning. However, managers organise useful developmental training and sharing of good practice for teaching staff, and their records indicate that these are

having some positive impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. Managers recognise that they do not yet have a system in place to give them regular insights into the quality of teaching and learning beyond the formal biannual OTLAs.

- My final line of enquiry reviewed whether Focus managers have developed a robust quality improvement plan to facilitate further improvements to the provision. Managers have expanded the quality improvement plan (QIP), which now reflects closely the findings of a thorough self-assessment. However, managers are mainly using the QIP to summarise what needs to be improved, but do not review progress towards achieving QIP actions, either regularly or rigorously enough. Overall, the QIP is not specific enough about how improvement actions will be achieved, how progress will be measured, over what timescale, by whom or by when.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- success rates for health and social care, and business administration learners improve
- the observations process routinely and regularly evaluates the impact of teaching on learning
- all improvement actions in the quality improvement plan are specific, measurable and rigorously reviewed
- differences in how well learners develop their English language skills are eliminated
- all business administration learners use the full breadth of resources available on the virtual learning environment
- electrical learners have an agreed training plan in their workplace and all employers provide opportunities for a broad range of skills and knowledge development.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Crombie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors, together with the managing director of Focus as nominee, conducted the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report,

improvement plan and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements about learners' attainment of qualifications. Inspectors met with, and gathered the views of, employers and learners following apprenticeship programmes at all levels in the subject areas offered; these views are reflected throughout the report. Inspectors met with Focus's leaders, managers, assessment and training staff. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.