

Focus Training Limited

Interim visit report

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| Unique reference number: | 51873 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Kim Bleasdale, HMI |
| Visit date(s): | 14–15 October 2020 |
| Type of provider: | Independent learning provider |
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Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Focus Training Limited (Focus Training) is a private training provider that operates out of Bolton, Lancashire. It provides training in health and fitness through government-funded advanced learner loans. The company was established in 2000. Learners attend face-to-face, practical training and assessment sessions in Birmingham, Crawley, Ellesmere Port, Manchester and Leeds. The remainder of work is completed through distance learning via an online learning portal. Learners complete learning workbooks, submit work online and receive telephone support and tutorials to help their learning. Courses include personal training, gym instructor, sports massage, exercise referral and specialist practitioner up to level 4.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders and managers carefully reviewed the teaching and learning strategies in use during the period when they were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions. There were a number of learners who did not make progress in their practical assessments because of the national closure of gyms during this period. Senior leaders were mindful of learners' frustrations and they increased the number of theory lessons through telephone tutorials.

Since August 2020, leaders have implemented a phased opening of face-to-face classroom teaching. To keep learners safe, leaders reduced class sizes, but increased the number of classes, so that learners do not feel disadvantaged. Leaders prioritised those learners who need practical assessments, for example in fitness instruction and personal training. Leaders recently agreed with their qualification awarding organisation that assessments can be completed by video. This means that in the event of any future COVID-19 restrictions, learners will be able to make progress in both their practical and theoretical assessments.

Leaders provided staff with the appropriate training that enabled them to support learners throughout the pandemic. Managers and staff maintained regular telephone contact to help learners with their mental health and personal anxieties. Senior leaders have given help to a few learners who encountered financial difficulties. They made a strategic decision to waive deposits for courses in order to help those who were made redundant and wished to re-train for a different career.

Leaders appreciate that some learners remain fearful about returning to face-to-face classroom and practical learning environments. These learners continue to build their knowledge through telephone tutorials, which helps them to continue to make progress towards achieving their qualifications.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

In order to assure the quality of the curriculum, senior leaders supported tutors to develop a curriculum that is both flexible and challenging. They now focus delivery on the 'client journey', which includes initial topics such as the health screening of clients and completing a client consultation. Learners move on to fitness and nutrition units and they plan a training programme to meet their clients' individual needs.

Tutors already used extensive online strategies to confidently teach their courses. During the pandemic, they took the opportunity to develop and increase the number of learning resources and make changes to the online learning portal. Through the revised portal, managers and tutors can now track learners' progress. This allows tutors to tailor learning and assessment accordingly. For example, when any gaps in learners' knowledge are identified, tutors provide individual revision sessions. Managers have had very positive feedback from learners and staff about the effects of these changes.

Since the pandemic, managers and tutors have recognised the need to take a more empathetic approach to learners with regard to their mental health and well-being. Tutors have received training that helps them to confidently do this. Managers identified that this approach has increased learner engagement during the pandemic.

Learners appreciate the more extensive, regular and flexible support they now get from tutors. Their tutorials are arranged around busy family life and other commitments. Learners who are identified as having dyslexia are provided with tools to help them learn. Tutors receive training on how to adapt learning materials for these learners. This helps learners to develop their own action plans and individual goals. They are more reflective and self-critical, and this has helped them to take responsibility for their own learning and development.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Throughout the pandemic, tutors contacted learners, including those they considered to be vulnerable, to check that they were safe and to discuss how well they were progressing. Leaders made mental health and well-being a priority during this time. Staff continue to monitor and discuss learners' mental health on a daily basis with managers.

As part of their initial induction on the course, most learners received training on online safety, including the dangers of radicalisation. Learners understand how to keep themselves safe and how to raise safeguarding concerns. For example, gym instructor learners know the importance of cleaning the equipment before and after activities with different clients. Tutors take learners' temperature prior to face-to-face learning sessions.

Leaders improved safeguarding learning materials to ensure that learners were safe online during the pandemic. This included information on online stalking and using private social media.

Leaders continue to provide regular training and updates on safeguarding for staff.

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