

Inspection of Focus Training Limited

Inspection dates:

30 November to 3 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Adult learning programmes

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Focus Training Limited (Focus Training) is an independent learning provider based in Bolton, Lancashire. It provides training in health and fitness designed to meet government initiatives in providing trained health and fitness professionals. Courses are funded through advanced learner loans. The company was established in 2000. The provider does not subcontract any of its provision.

At the time of the inspection, there were 552 adults in learning. Most learners study level 3 courses in personal training, gym instructing, sports massage, exercise referral and specialist programmes such as Pilates instruction. Most learning is carried out through distance learning via an online learning portal and telephone support calls. Learners also attend in-person practical training and assessment sessions in Birmingham, London, Ellesmere Port, Manchester and Leeds.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners who attend in-person assessment sessions enjoy their learning. However, too often, leaders postpone or cancel sessions. Leaders do not ensure that learners know when a replacement session will be available. Learners are frustrated that they do not have enough contact with staff to help them to learn. Most learners make slow progress.

Most learners are unable to recall the information they learn through the online portal. Telephone support calls from staff are intended to support online learning and explain key concepts to learners. However, the frequency of calls varies between learners, and a few learners have not received a call for several months. When staff make calls, the actions set do not challenge learners. Staff do not teach learners the knowledge they require to successfully complete their qualification.

Learners gain a sufficient awareness of healthy living through the curriculum. They learn about the benefits of exercise and nutrition and how these can contribute to a healthier life. Learners use this knowledge to live a healthier lifestyle, such as by improving their diet. They transfer this knowledge to their clients.

Learners are aware of the importance of professional behaviours from the training they receive. For example, learners are aware of the need to establish clear boundaries with clients to maintain appropriate relationships.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Learners receive a poor quality of training. The quality of training has deteriorated since the previous inspection. Most of the areas for improvement identified three years ago remain. At the previous monitoring visit, it was identified that leaders had started to improve many of these weaknesses. However, since then, leaders have more than trebled the number of learners enrolled on courses, but have not increased the number of staff accordingly. Consequently, learners wait too long to be contacted by tutors, which delays their learning.

Tutors gather basic information on what learners already know and can do at the start of the programme. However, they do not use this information to individualise the curriculum. Leaders' aspirations for the most able learners are too low. Learners with prior experience in the fitness industry complete the same programme as learners with no experience. Learners with experience become demotivated and do not learn substantial new knowledge and skills.

Leaders do not plan the curriculum in sufficient depth to enable learners to understand more complex topics. For example, learners apply the basic principles of personal training such as encouraging clients to maximise their training programmes. However, they are unable to recall topics such as the importance of energy production or the digestive system. Many learners do not learn the in-depth knowledge required to be successful personal trainers.

Tutors do not accurately assess or provide timely feedback on learners' written work. Most learners wait a considerable period of time before receiving any feedback, and a few have been waiting for several months. Too many learners produce work that is below the standard required for a level 3 qualification. Learners produce lists or single words as answers rather than an explanation or a description, yet when their work is marked, they receive full marks. Learners are therefore unable to fully explain key topics such as heat loss through the body when exercising.

Tutors do not provide sufficient support for learners to improve their English and mathematical skills. Tutors check spelling, punctuation and grammar on written work and provide written feedback to learners. However, tutors do not revisit subsequent written work to check whether learners have understood or improved their writing. Consequently, a few learners continue to make the same mistakes.

Tutors do not provide effective academic support for learners. Many learners frequently fail to meet the deadlines that tutors set for written work, and too often do not attend planned telephone support calls. Tutors do not set high enough expectations for learners to achieve. Leaders do not promote an ambitious culture. Consequently, just over half of learners are beyond their planned end-date.

Leaders do not provide adequate careers advice and guidance to all learners. A few learners are aware of further study they could complete at the provider, such as additional courses in exercise referral and pre- and post-natal exercise. However, they are unaware of other opportunities outside the provider or how to develop their career further, such as how to set up their own personal training business.

Leaders do not have effective plans in place for learners to make sustained progress in their studies or to achieve their qualifications. They do not have a clear oversight of learners' progress. A significant minority of learners believe that they have completed their qualifications when they have not. Their progression has been delayed because of outstanding work that has not been assessed or inefficient planning of in-person assessments. These learners are prevented from achieving their personal goals and subsequently gaining employment in the sports industry.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders do not follow their own safe recruitment policy. They ensure that all staff complete a Disclosure and Barring Service check. However, they do not obtain or record references appropriately and do not always check the identification of new employees. Consequently, leaders cannot be assured that staff are suitable to work with vulnerable adults.

Leaders do not sufficiently risk assess in-person training venues. Venues have not been assessed for safety for over two years, despite practical training resuming six months ago.

Learners feel safe. They know how and to whom they should report concerns. Most learners have a basic understanding of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that they recruit new employees safely so that they can be assured that staff are suitable to work with vulnerable adults.
- Leaders must risk assess in-person training venues to ensure that these are safe places to carry out training.
- Leaders should provide enough staffing resource to ensure that staff are able to provide more frequent training and support to learners.
- Leaders should identify what learners already know and can do at the start of the programme and use this information to ensure that all learners develop new knowledge and skills on their courses.
- Leaders should ensure that learners' work is marked accurately and on time, so that learners understand how to improve their work to the required standard.
- Leaders should monitor learners' progress rigorously to identify those learners who are not making the expected progress on their courses. Where learners make slow progress, leaders should set specific actions for learners to catch up, so that they gain the knowledge and skills required to be successful health and fitness professionals.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51873
Address	5 Cannon Court Institute Street BL1 1PZ
Contact number	07887 530989
Website	www.focus-training.com
Principal/CEO	Bob Ellis
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	9 to 12 October 2018

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the finance director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including listening to telephone support calls, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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