

Inspection of Focus Training (SW) Limited

Inspection dates: 7 to 10 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Focus Training (SW) Limited was established in 1999. It is an independent training provider with training centres in Plymouth, Redruth, Exeter and Bristol. Focus Training works with employers across the south west of England to offer apprenticeships in electrical installation, gas engineering, fire emergency and security systems, accounting, care, business administration and customer service. At the time of inspection, Focus Training had around 600 apprentices. Around 470 apprentices study the level 3 installation electrician apprenticeship. Around one fifth of apprentices have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The vast majority of apprentices are taught in one of the provider's four training centres. A few are taught online or at the premises of employers.

The provider has seven learners studying adult learning programmes at their Plymouth centre. The vast majority of these learners are on level 3 adult care courses.

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

Apprentices enjoy their training. They value highly the occupational knowledge they gain as a result of tutors' and assessors' industry experience of the subjects they teach. Apprentices are motivated and committed to their studies and their careers. Apprentices attend well and present themselves professionally. They have a responsible approach to their training and are well prepared for lessons, bringing with them the equipment they require, such as textbooks, calculators and folders.

Tutors plan training so that it rapidly develops apprentices' confidence in their technical and practical skills. They provide apprentices with well-structured training to practise techniques and procedures in different ways, so that they become confident to apply their skills independently. Tutors and assessors work with employers to ensure apprentices have opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills while on the job in their workplaces. For example, level 3 installation electrician apprentices work alongside more experienced colleagues who oversee their installations, including checking the electrical connections apprentices make before completing tasks. As a result, apprentices become valued employees, and almost all stay with their employer after they complete their apprenticeship. Apprentices bring back valuable new knowledge and skills to their employers as a result of the training they receive in emerging technologies, such as electric vehicle charging and solar energy.

Learners studying adult education programmes in adult care enjoy their studies. They are motivated by tutors to succeed and perform their jobs in care homes to the very best of their abilities. Tutors ensure that adult learners gain useful new knowledge and skills that help them to perform work tasks better and more confidently. For example, learners who work in nursing homes know how to ensure that residents who have sight or hearing loss can enjoy music by placing their hands on audio speakers so they can feel the vibrations of the music being played.

Apprentices and learners feel safe. They know whom to contact if they, or their peers, feel unsafe and are confident that their concerns would be taken seriously by staff.

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

Leaders are ambitious to provide high-quality apprenticeship training that meets the needs of the employers they work with. They provide modern classrooms and workshop resources for apprentices, who become knowledgeable and skilled in the use of the equipment they will encounter when working in industry. For example, training in smoke detecting resources prepares apprentices studying level 3 fire emergency and security systems technician apprenticeships well for fitting and testing a wide range of different fire detection systems.

Leaders are rightly proud that the large majority of apprentices successfully achieve their qualification. Leaders have diligently supported apprentices studying longer

apprenticeship programmes who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to remain on their programmes and to succeed. Around four fifths of apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeship, and all adults pass their qualifications. As a result, most apprentices and adult learners secure full-time jobs and many gain promotions.

Tutors and assessors are experts in their industries. They are well qualified and highly experienced in the subjects they teach. They use their industry expertise skilfully to bring the content of the curriculum to life for apprentices and adult learners. Tutors ensure that most teaching sessions are well planned to ensure that knowledge and skills are presented and demonstrated to apprentices clearly. Tutors provide clear explanations using specific terminology and intersperse explanations frequently with pertinent questions to test apprentices' knowledge and understanding. For example, tutors teaching level 3 installation electrician apprenticeship provide useful practical demonstrations and activities that help apprentices to prepare well for their examinations. Tutors develop securely apprentices' use of subject- and sector-specific terminology so that apprentices consistently and fluently use the correct terms in their work. For example, level 3 gas engineering apprentices know how to describe specific pipe volumes and installation volume totals.

Tutors use effective oral questioning, mini-assessments, short tests and quizzes that check thoroughly how well apprentices have retained the knowledge they have been taught. Tutors use the results of these activities to set progressively more challenging tasks for apprentices to ensure that they make swift and significant progress. For example, level 3 electrical installation tutors break down complex power and voltage dissipation formulas into smaller steps to ensure that apprentices' starting points reflect what they know and can do so they can make positive progress. Tutors provide helpful additional support for apprentices who require more assistance to understand complex and difficult areas of content. As a result, almost all apprentices make rapid progress towards gaining the knowledge and skills they require for their final assessments and work. However, a very few apprentices studying business-related apprenticeships are not challenged well enough by tutors to improve their knowledge beyond the minimum requirements of the qualification they are studying. Tutors do not set sufficiently ambitious targets to improve apprentices' knowledge and skills. As a result, very few of these apprentices achieve merit and distinction grades in their final assessments.

Leaders support tutors and assessors to continually improve and update their subject and occupational knowledge through a programme of industry-related training activities. The vast majority are qualified as teachers and hold relevant assessment awards. Managers have identified areas of teaching that require improvement, for example the effectiveness of feedback to apprentices, target setting and the teaching of functional skills. However, leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching lack focus, and they have not put in place the professional development that is needed to improve these weaknesses.

Tutors use assessment well to check apprentices' and adult learners' understanding of key concepts through written assessments and completion of portfolios. For example, level 2 customer service apprentices are encouraged to discuss and debate topics in lessons and present their findings to the group. However, the feedback provided by tutors to a small minority of apprentices is not sufficiently constructive. Consequently, apprentices do not understand what they need to do to improve and make the progress they are capable of towards their final exams.

Managers identify apprentices and adult learners with SEND through a robust initial assessment process. They communicate well to tutors and assessors the information they need to support apprentices and adult learners. For example, they deploy coloured paper, the use of laptops and extra time and use alternative assessments via observation and recorded discussions. Apprentices value this additional support and praise the mentoring and dedicated support available to them. As a result, those with additional needs achieve at least in line with their peers.

Tutors support apprentices who need to gain qualifications in English and mathematics to successfully achieve them. Tutors provide extra days outside of term times to focus on apprentices' weaker knowledge and skills in these subjects. Tutors receive appropriate training to support their teaching of functional skills. However, support in many cases is only offered to apprentices following multiple unsuccessful attempts at the exams. As a result, apprentices' completion of their functional skills qualifications is slow and first-time pass rates are too low. Leaders rightly recognise this as a weakness and are implementing changes to their strategy to improve the swiftness with which apprentices achieve their qualifications.

Tutors identify well opportunities for apprentices to develop their mathematical and English skills as part of their jobs. For example, level 3 electrical apprentices learn how to use formulas to calculate power and resistance. They also learn how to write reports and are encouraged to review their drafts and reflect on the correctness of structure, content, spelling and grammar. As a result, apprentices develop well their confidence in the mathematical skills and English knowledge required for their job roles.

Tutors teach the majority of apprentices and adult learners well about how to stay physically and mentally healthy and what positive and unhealthy personal and work relationships are. However, tutors do not teach these topics well enough to apprentices who are 16 to 18 years of age. Consequently, the understanding these apprentices have is superficial. They do not retain this important knowledge so they can apply it at work and in their personal lives.

Tutors ensure that most apprentices and adult learners receive good information and guidance about career opportunities within their industry and workplace. However, they do not provide apprentices with careers guidance to inform them about wider career or progression opportunities outside of their current role or employer.

Governors are experienced and knowledgeable in education, training and the industries that apprentices work in. They provide leaders with well-judged support

and challenge so that they can make informed decisions. For example, governors identified a demand for apprenticeships in fire emergency and security systems and supported leaders to implement successful apprenticeship curriculums to service this industry.

Leaders have a broad understanding of what the strengths and weaknesses of the provider are. However, they do not ensure that they take sufficiently robust actions to improve areas that are weaker. For example, leaders understated the improvements needed in the teaching of the wider curriculum. As a result, they have been slow to improve this, resulting in a minority of apprentices not understanding well enough about life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- The provider should ensure that teaching staff take part in high-quality training to continuously improve their teaching skills.
- The provider should ensure that younger apprentices are taught an effective curriculum that enables them to understand healthy lifestyles and relationships and prepares them for life in modern Britain.
- The provider should undertake a more robust assessment of weaknesses and the actions needed to improve them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50126
Address	63-69 St Modwen Road Plymouth PL6 8LH
Contact number	01752348980
Website	https://www.thefocustraininggroup.com/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jamie Rail
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 June 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing 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 visiting learning sessions, 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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