

# Focus Training (Plymouth)

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**Inspection date**

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**Inspection number**

**301063**

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Retail and commercial enterprise
- Business administration and law

## Description of the provider

1. Focus Training, Plymouth (Focus) was established in March 1999 and delivers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in retail and warehousing, hospitality, business administration, customer service and team leading. The company also holds a Train to Gain contract for NVQs in retail, hospitality, customer service and administration. At the time of the inspection there were a total of 91 business and administration learners and 108 retail and commercial enterprise learners. Focus also delivers health and social care training for 22 learners and some commercially funded short courses to employers. This provision was not inspected.
2. Focus' head office in Plympton near Plymouth is led by three working partners who manage 15 staff. Almost all training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Assessors are based throughout Devon and Cornwall. Most learners are employed in the Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter areas, although their geographical spread is from Bridgwater in west Somerset to Penzance in the south-west. Focus has contracts with Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC) although there is a small amount of work subcontracted from Cornwall College.
3. In 2005-06 the south-west had a population of 5,067,800 of whom 49% were male. Unemployment in the region was 3.8%, compared with the national average of 5.4%. Almost two thirds of the resident population held qualifications at NVQ level 2, and 46% were qualified to NVQ level 3. Data from the 2001 census shows over 96% of the population were white. The largest minority ethnic group were Asian or Asian British, who made up just over half of 1% of the population.

## Summary of grades awarded

<b>Effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Achievement and standards</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Equality of opportunity</b>	<b>Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Sector subject area

<b>Retail and commercial enterprise</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Business administration and law</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. The quality of the provision in the two sector subject areas (SSAs) inspected is satisfactory. Overall success rates for apprenticeships and Train to Gain NVQs is satisfactory. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices are improving but they remain low. Timely success rate in both SSAs have improved significantly over the last three years but they remain low. In both SSAs learners develop good work-based skills and self-confidence.
5. Teaching and learning is satisfactory. There is good on-the-job training from employers in business administration and customer care. Teaching and learning in retail and hospitality is satisfactory. The delivery of key skills is satisfactory in both areas. Resources for learning provided by Focus and employers are satisfactory. Assessment is satisfactory. There is insufficient co-ordination between training provided by employers and the goals of the apprentices. The range of programmes meets the needs of learners effectively. Focus works well with employers and is responsive to their business needs. Social inclusion, guidance and support are all satisfactory. Links with external advice and support agencies are adequate.
6. Leadership and management is satisfactory. Training is planned satisfactorily. The support for often widely dispersed staff is particularly effective. Communication within Focus is good. The use of partnerships in supporting equality of opportunity is good, both for staff training and the promotion of learning. However, the recruitment of minority ethnic and disabled learners is low. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the well-being of young people are satisfactory, as were arrangements for quality improvement. However, there is insufficient setting of targets to support improvements in quality.

#### Capacity to improve

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. Focus demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. The company has maintained the key strengths identified in the previous reinspection report and has taken effective action to address many of the areas for improvement. Since the reinspection in 2004 apprenticeship success rates have steadily improved to equal the national averages for 2005-06.
8. Focus takes satisfactory action to promote improvement. There are thorough and well structured procedures to monitor quality arrangements. The use of management information, identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, has improved. Management information is used appropriately as an integral part of the monitoring process for improvement. Appropriate staff observation arrangements are in place. Staff are observed in their work with learners and feedback is used effectively to improve the planning of training, assessment and the review of learners' progress.
9. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and broadly accurate in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors judged the self-assessment report (SAR) grades as accurate and self-assessment is suitably inclusive. Staff are fully consulted and

feedback from learners and employers informs the report appropriately. Effective use is made of data and the results of quality monitoring to inform the self-assessment, which is self-critical and evaluative.

## Key strengths

- Good development of learners' work-based skills and self-confidence
- Good on-the-job training
- Particularly effective support for widely dispersed staff

## Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient co-ordination between employer training and apprenticeship goals
- Insufficient target-setting to support quality improvement
- Low recruitment of minority ethnic and disabled learners

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, and as noted in the SAR, success rates for apprentices have improved from 31% in 2003-04 to 57% in 2005-06, which is satisfactory. Train to Gain NVQ qualification success rates are also satisfactory at 84% in 2005-06. Success rates for advanced apprentices have improved from 17% in 2003-04, but they remain low at 33% in 2005-06. Success rates for learners completing to the planned timescale have improved significantly in both SSAs over the last three years but they remain low. Provisional data supplied by Focus indicates that the improvement in success rates has continued in 2006-07. Learners gain good workplace and personal skills and enjoy their learning. Employers value learners and their increasing contribution to the workplace.

### Quality of provision

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. On-the-job training by employers, particularly in business administration and customer service, is good. Teaching and learning in retail and hospitality is satisfactory. The delivery of key skills has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory in both areas. Resources for learning provided by Focus and employers are satisfactory. Assessment is satisfactory. There is insufficient co-ordination between training provided by employers and the wider learning goals of the apprenticeship framework. This issue is not identified in the SAR. The range of programmes is satisfactory; Focus successfully meets the needs of learners and employers which include a bowling alley and bakery. Social inclusion is satisfactory overall, but the number of learners from ethnic minorities and those with declared disabilities is low. Guidance and support is satisfactory. Assessors work well with learners making timely visits and are easily accessible through mobile telephones and email. Suitable progression advice is available. Links with external advice and support agencies are suitable to promote learners' healthy lifestyles.

### Leadership and management

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

#### Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. Support for often widely dispersed staff is particularly effective. Focus has comprehensive and effective procedures for staff working arrangements that are well implemented. There are particularly good support arrangements for staff who travel widely in their work. Staff work effectively with learners throughout the south west. Communication systems are good and well established with all staff. Partners consult closely with staff on the operation and development of training provision. Staff appraisals are thorough and supportive. Staff participate in relevant training and development. Most staff are well qualified.

13. Focus has thorough systems to monitor quality arrangements. As recognised in the self-assessment, these are well structured and cover every stage of the learners' journey. Monitoring is detailed and based on well planned sampling of observations. Most performance indicators used are appropriate, although some are not sufficiently effective. Monitoring is closely linked to staff development and builds on examples of best practice. The quality team meets regularly to monitor and review quality improvement. Internal verification is satisfactory. Focus has effective systems linked to appropriate guidance and training for assessors. The availability and use of resources are satisfactory. Actions to ensure the safety of learners are satisfactory with adequate checks made of employers' arrangements. Staff receive appropriate security checks for working with young people.
14. The management of information has improved since the previous inspection and is satisfactory. Focus has developed its own system to produce useful monitoring reports on key aspects of training. The quality of advice and guidance provided to learners is satisfactory. Arrangements to manage literacy, numeracy and language skills support are appropriate. Initial assessment is effective in identifying learners with specific needs and an appropriate range of support is available. Assessors receive appropriate guidance from specialist staff.
15. Co-ordination between training provided by employers and the goals of the apprentices is insufficient. This was a weakness at the previous inspection. Employers' involvement across the provision is inconsistent. Although most sign the review forms, some employers do not participate in learners' progress reviews. Until recently, Focus required all employers to participate in progress reviews. The planning of opportunities for employer training is not sufficiently identified. Focus is aware of the need to improve employer involvement and has introduced an employer newsletter to inform and engage employers.
16. Insufficient targets are set to improve quality. Focus has a detailed quality improvement plan which includes the strengths and areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. Many of the improvements in the plan, however, do not have specific and measurable targets. Some of the related actions and planned outcomes are not sufficiently clear to inform planning for improvement effectively. Although the quality improvement plan is used as part of the organisation's quality arrangements, improvements are not monitored systematically.
17. Focus have good partnerships to support equality of opportunity. The company has joined with other providers in the Devon & Cornwall Training Providers Network in taking part in equality training and awareness raising events and a training promotion event for minority ethnic groups in Plymouth. The company supports employers effectively, providing regular updates on current equality legislation through its employer newsletter.
18. The equality and diversity policies and procedures are satisfactory and are appropriately disseminated. Data is used effectively to inform the management of equality and diversity. Arrangements to manage and monitor appeals and complaints are appropriate. Learners understand clearly what they need to do if they have concerns. Promotion of training is satisfactory. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is adequate.
19. The recruitment of minority ethnic and disabled learners is low. Between 2003-04 and 2005-06 minority ethnic representation fell from 2.5% to 1.7% compared with a Devon

and Cornwall participation rate of 8.1%. The participation rate for disabled learners has increased from 2.7% to 6.4% between 2003 and 2006, but the Devon and Cornwall rate in 2005-06 was 15.3%. Measures taken to improve participation have to date been unsuccessful.

## What learners like:

- ‘It’s made clear right from the start that it’s your responsibility to get the work done’
- ‘I like that my assessor brings a laptop in to work for me to use’
- ‘I have gained more knowledge and have a better understanding of work’
- ‘I am overwhelmed with the support, friendliness and general attitude of tutors who always put everything in ways that are easily understood’

## What learners think could improve:

- ‘NVQ paperwork is complicated and sometimes hard to understand’
- ‘I would like more time off the shop floor’
- ‘More training on visits to get my NVQ quicker’
- Better communication between various members of staff

## Sector subject areas

### **Retail and commercial enterprise**

#### **Satisfactory: Grade 3**

#### **Context**

20. At the time of inspection there were 82 learners working towards qualifications in retail with 42 apprentices, 24 advanced apprentices and 16 on an NVQ-only programme as part of Train to Gain. There were 26 learners working towards qualifications in hospitality with 13 apprentices, 12 advanced apprentices and one on an NVQ-only programme as part of Train to Gain. Learners are employed when they are enrolled. Their suitability for training is assessed by interview and through a test of their literacy and numeracy skills. Induction takes place in the workplace. Assessors visit learners in the workplace every three to four weeks to provide training and assessment and review their progress. Learners are employed in a wide range of retail and hospitality companies, from major brand businesses to small independent firms.

#### **Strengths**

- Particularly effective development of learners' workplace and personal skills

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Insufficient involvement of employers in planning individual learning

#### **Achievement and standards**

21. Success rates for all learners are satisfactory. Apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship success rates have improved consistently since 2003-04, and in 2005-06 were at and slightly above national averages respectively. The latest provisional data suggests an improving trend. Apprentices and advanced apprentices are making satisfactory progress towards every component of their framework. Learners' workplace and personal skills are developed particularly effectively. Learners have increased confidence and are enthusiastic about learning. They are keen to learn different aspects of their job. Many have additional responsibilities and have been promoted within their workplace. Employers comment on learners' increased interest and enthusiasm at work. Learners are motivated to achieve all aspects of their qualification and are encouraged by Focus to gain additional qualifications where relevant. Learners' portfolios contain a good standard of work, which is relevant to all aspects of the qualification and the learners' specific workplace.

#### **Quality of provision**

22. Training in the workplace is satisfactory. Learners receive an effective induction at the start of their programme and are able to demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of the

topics covered. Learners also have an adequate understanding of their framework requirements, and are aware of the appeals and complaints procedures. Learners complete a suitable initial assessment. Assessors work effectively with their learners to plan an appropriate level of support which might include additional visits, one-to-one coaching or referral to more specialist support. Learners with additional learning or social needs feel adequately supported and are making satisfactory progress towards their learning goals.

23. Focus provides appropriate initial advice and guidance and most learners' personal and employment needs are met effectively. Learners are encouraged to participate in additional relevant training which will benefit them and their employer, for example health and safety and food hygiene courses. Assessors conduct suitable training sessions in the workplace to support learning for the technical certificate and key skills. Assessments are satisfactory. A wide range of assessment methods are used and evidence is clearly cross referenced to all aspects of the framework. Employers are often asked to produce witness testimonies. Effective assessment action plans are agreed during each visit with clear short-term targets which are well understood by learners. Assessments are timed to take careful account of learner and employer needs.
24. Focus provides satisfactory support for their learners. Learners value the close working relationship they have with their assessors and are able to request and receive additional support where necessary, whether work-related or on personal matters. Learners and assessors are in regular contact between visits by telephone and text message. Learners also have access to a freephone office number and a confidential hotline number. Progress reviews are adequate. Reviews are timely and involve a discussion on learner performance together with medium and long-term setting of targets. Targets are appropriately challenging and clearly relate to the NVQ, key skills and technical certificate. Reviews reinforce induction topics such as health and safety and equality and diversity. Few employers, however, take part in the review meeting and are not involved in agreeing targets for learners.
25. Employers are insufficiently involved in planning individual learning. Most employers are supportive but do not have a sufficient understanding of their learners' programmes. Assessors have good rapport with employers but most are not actively involved in discussing and planning the detail of individual learning programmes. Some learners' assessment tasks in the workplace are incomplete and not always discussed with the employers. Records are mainly retrospective and do not capture or target opportunities for assessment or collecting evidence. Training by employers does not form an effective part of the learning plan and in some cases assessors are unaware of relevant on and off-the-job training taking place.

### **Leadership and management**

26. Leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff involved in supporting learners in retail and hospitality qualifications are well qualified and occupationally experienced. Assessors have an appropriate number of learners to support, considering the frequency of visits and the wide geographical location. Focus provides good support for staff and many speak highly of the opportunities for continuous professional development. Staff appreciate the regular communication throughout the company and with their line managers. Assessors

feel valued within the organisation. They are given clear targets for learners' achievement, and performance is monitored and discussed monthly. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets awarding body standards. Internal verification planning is satisfactory with appropriate sampling. Learners and employers demonstrate good awareness of the process. Staff are involved satisfactorily in the self-assessment process and their views are taken into account. The self-assessment report is generally accurate and takes account of learners and employers views. Equality of opportunity is covered adequately at induction and reinforced throughout the learning period. Assessors make an effort to ensure any discussion on equality is set in the context of retail and relevant to the learner. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

## **Business administration and law**

### **Satisfactory: Grade 3**

#### **Context**

27. There are 91 learners in administration, customer service and team leading. There are 52 apprentices including 36 in customer service, seven in business administration and nine in team leading. There is one advanced apprentice in business administration and seven in customer service. Train to Gain level 2 programmes are being followed by 31 learners, mainly in customer service. Learners are recruited from a wide geographical area and all are employed. All training is delivered in the workplace.

#### **Strengths**

- Good progress of current learners
- Good training in the workplace
- Well targeted response to the needs of learners and employers

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Insufficient co-ordination between employer training and apprenticeship goals
- Insufficiently challenging targets for some learners

#### **Achievement and standards**

28. Learners' achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners are making good progress and most have achieved some part of their qualification, such as keys skills or the technical certificate. Portfolios are of a high standard with a good range of work based evidence. Learners are developing good personal and workplace skills and employers speak highly of the contribution that they make to the workplace. The delivery of key skills has improved since the previous inspection and is now introduced early in the programme. Success rates for apprentices are satisfactory at close to or slightly above the national average. Since 2003-04 both overall and timely success rates have steadily improved. Advanced apprentices' success rates are improving but have been below national averages since 2003-04. The number of advanced apprentices has declined steadily since 2003-04. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are satisfactory. Qualifications were gained by 84% of the 47 learners recruited in 2005-06.

#### **Quality of provision**

29. Training in the workplace is good. Employers make available externally accredited qualifications, such as first aid and hygiene certificates and also deliver good in-house training. Learners value highly the training they receive and the opportunity to shadow and learn from more experienced colleagues. Learners' and employers' needs are met effectively by Focus. Learners are very actively involved in planning their own learning and choose programmes which reflect their day to day job role. Learners choose units from the qualification carefully which meet the changing needs of the business. Focus engages effectively with small employers who would not traditionally offer business qualifications to their employees, such as a bowling alley and bakery, encouraging them to

invest in their workforce. Focus effectively supports learners with a wide variety of abilities and expectations. Employers are informed with accurate and timely information on the progress of their learners.

30. Assessment is satisfactory. Learners are visited in the workplace at least once a month and a good range of appropriate assessment methods are employed. Some learners do not categorise the support from assessors as formal training but rather as guidance towards gathering evidence. Observations for assessment often lead to feedback on how to improve performance and are good opportunities for effective coaching. Action plans help learners to understand their immediate tasks clearly and complete them promptly. Induction is satisfactory. Inductions are one-to-one in the workplace and allow the learner to settle in quickly. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners have an interview and an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The results are appropriately communicated to learners and identify additional support needs which include access to qualified literacy and numeracy tutors. Support for learners is satisfactory. All learners have contact telephone numbers for their assessors and are able to access the company website for other support services. The review process is satisfactory. Reviews are planned and regular and records of learner progress, action plans, monitoring of health and safety and equality of opportunity are appropriate. Assessors use data spreadsheets effectively to monitor and manage learner progress.
31. Some learners are not set appropriately challenging targets. Assessors have a very good working relationship with learners and take into account personal circumstances when setting targets. Some learners, however, already have qualifications at level 2 and targets do not reflect this. Targets are sufficiently challenging for some learners and accelerate their progress. Other learners are highly motivated and keen to progress, both within the workplace and in the level of qualification. They would welcome a more demanding workload to complete between monthly assessments.
32. There is insufficient co-ordination between training provided by employers and apprentices learning goals. Learners are receiving good on-the-job training which is recorded during the eight-weekly reviews but it is not referenced adequately to the NVQ. Too few employers are offered, or take up, the opportunity to participate in planning training or assessment. Employers are not sufficiently consulted on opportunities to identify and generate evidence.

### **Leadership and management**

33. Leadership and management is satisfactory. The course team works particularly well together and focuses clearly on the learners when they meet each month. Resources are satisfactory and staff are suitably qualified. Assessors and verifiers keep a file on their continuous professional development which includes the courses that they attend and their relevance to the training process. The number of staff involved in training is satisfactory. Assessors have appropriate targets for recruitment and learner progress which are effectively monitored. Internal verification is satisfactory, well planned and thoroughly recorded with appropriate actions for improvement.
34. Learners have a satisfactory knowledge of equality and diversity and are confident when discussing their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. Management information is used effectively at a local level to monitor learners' progress. All staff contributed to the

self-assessment report which is realistic and recognises most of the strengths and areas for improvement identified by inspectors.

## Learners' achievements

### Success rates on work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes managed by Focus Training 2004 year to 2006 year

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	48	27%	48%	17%	31%
		timely	50	16%	30%	6%	19%
	04-05	overall	38	32%	48%	21%	34%
		timely	34	32%	31%	18%	21%
	05-06	overall	18	44%	54%	33%	44%
		timely	16	25%	34%	25%	27%
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	99	41%	47%	31%	32%
		timely	101	14%	24%	13%	16%
	04-05	overall	107	46%	50%	37%	38%
		timely	89	26%	29%	24%	22%
	05-06	overall	93	61%	58%	57%	53%
		timely	84	42%	38%	40%	33%

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

### Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	05/06	overall	47	84%
		timely		72%
	06/07	overall	42 ***	88% (1)
		timely		79% (1)

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Incomplete in year number. A further 43 learners still on qualification at the time of the inspection.

(1) Success rates of those who have completed.