

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Focus Training  
Date of visit: 9 October 2008

### Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection of Focus Training, Plymouth (Focus) in July 2007, at which the effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. Provision in retail and commercial enterprise and business, administration and law was also satisfactory.

Since the previous inspection, Focus has made changes to its organisational structure. Two working partners and two senior managers now lead the head office and manage 16 other staff. Focus contracts with the Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for apprenticeship and Train to Gain provision. At the previous inspection, Focus had 221 learners. One hundred and eight were in retail and commercial enterprise, 91 were in business, administration and law and 22 were in health and social care training. The health and social care provision was not inspected. At the time of the monitoring visit, Focus had 288 learners, 70 of whom were on health and social care programmes. The health and social care provision is now subcontracted to Venus Training, a provider which does not have a contract with the LSC.

Almost all training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Focus employs assessors based throughout Devon and Cornwall. Most learners are employed in the Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter areas, although learners are based in all areas of Devon and Cornwall.

### Achievement and standards

Have achievement and standards improved since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Achievement and standards were satisfactory at the previous inspection. Since then, Focus has made reasonable and sustained progress in improving framework completion. In 2005/06, the overall success rate for the apprenticeship was 52% and in 2006/07, it was 55%. At the time of the monitoring visit, the success rate for 2007/08 had risen to 68%, four percentage points higher than the current national rate. The overall timely success rate improved from 37% in 2005/06 to 54% in

2007/08, eight percentage points above the current national rate. The overall success rate on Train to Gain is satisfactory. In 2005/06, the overall success rate was 84% and in 2006/07, it was 85%.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring that targets for learners in business, administration and law are more challenging?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, targets for some learners in business, administration and law were insufficiently challenging. Focus has made reasonable progress in improving the setting of targets. Focus now ensures that individual learners have their own training programme that contains suitably challenging targets. For example, Focus now enters learners for key skills at an appropriate level for each individual. As a result, a number of learners have successfully achieved key skills qualifications above their framework requirements. Individual learning plans now include more challenging timescales for the completion of the framework, including planned end dates that are shorter than the standard length of programme. However, the targets agreed and recorded at progress reviews do not specify sufficiently challenging performance targets at unit level. For example, they do not detail the extent to which learners are required to complete a task beyond the minimum standard.

What progress has been made in improving the co-ordination of employer training and apprenticeship goals?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection, the co-ordination of employer training and apprenticeship goals remained insufficient, having been identified as a weakness in the 2004 reinspection. Since then, Focus has made insufficient progress. It has, however, made some improvements. It has recently amended the individual learning plan to include space to record the parts of the programme where employer-based training has been agreed. Progress review forms now identify more clearly the employer training that has taken place or is planned to take place by the time of the next progress review. However, many learners only require assessment of their vocational skills in the workplace to complete the national vocational qualification. Focus does not record the proportion of learners who require employer-based training as part of their programme. It does not routinely monitor the effectiveness of employer-based training. For those learners that require employer-based training, Focus does not have appropriate arrangements to plan or monitor the impact of this training. Focus does not have procedures for recording or monitoring the employer-based training on its apprenticeship programmes.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made in recruiting minority ethnic groups and disabled learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the recruitment of minority ethnic groups and learners with disabilities was low. Since then, Focus has made reasonable progress in recruiting learners with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups. Focus has provided more staff training to improve understanding of ethnicity in relation to recruitment. At the previous inspection, Focus did not accurately record the proportion of learners with a disability or from minority ethnic groups. Focus has now improved the way it records information about learners' disability and ethnicity. The proportion of learners with a disability or from minority ethnic groups has increased since the previous inspection. At the time of the monitoring visit, the participation rate for learners with disabilities was 21%, higher than the regional rate of 18%. The participation rate of learners from minority ethnic groups was 6%, which exceeded Focus' target of 3% and was above the regional rate of 4.7%. Analysis of achievement data indicates that success rates for learners from these groups are similar to other groups.

## Self-assessment and improvement planning

Is target-setting more effectively used in quality improvement than at the time of the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, target-setting was insufficient to support quality improvement. Many of the improvements identified in the quality improvement plan did not have specific and measurable targets. Some of the related actions and outcomes were not sufficiently clear and improvements were not monitored regularly. Since then, Focus has made significant progress in target-setting to support quality improvement. Targets are now clearly stated with completion and review dates. Actions and planned outcomes are now clearer. A member of staff is responsible for each target. Focus now monitors closely the progress made in completing each target through monthly quality improvement meetings, with detailed minutes. Focus has successfully raised the quality of provision over the last few months. It has increased success rates on apprenticeships, implemented an extensive information and learning technology (ILT) strategy and improved internal verification processes. Where progress to secure improvement is slow, Focus researches the reasons for this and specifies appropriate remedial action.

What progress has been made in the self-assessment and post-inspection planning processes?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the self-assessment process was satisfactory and broadly accurate in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Since then, Focus has made reasonable progress in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process and the post-inspection action plan. The self-assessment process has become more inclusive with improved use of feedback from learners, employers and staff. Staff contribute fully to the production and evaluation of the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report for 2006/07 is influenced significantly by the previous inspection report and focuses more on strengths rather than areas for improvement. The draft self-assessment report for 2007/08 is more comprehensive and includes reference to Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes and the Framework for Excellence. The current quality improvement plan links well to the self-assessment report. However, it concentrates on the operational management of the provision and does not include the strategic changes that have taken place or are planned.