

Focus Training (SW) Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 118845
Name of lead inspector: Nic T Brown HMI
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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Suite B, South Wing
Valley House
Valley Road
Plympton
Plymouth
PL7 1RF

Telephone number: 01752 348980

Information about the provider

1. Focus Training (SW) Ltd (Focus) was established as Focus Training in March
2. 1999 and became a limited company in 2009. Focus delivers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in health and social care, retailing and warehousing, hospitality, business administration, customer service, management and team leading. There are also a small number of learners in information technology and service enterprise who were included in the sample seen by inspectors, but not reported on separately. The company also holds a Train to Gain contract for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in health and social care, retail, hospitality, customer service and administration. Focus currently has 425 learners dispersed across Devon and Cornwall. Since the last inspection in 2007, Focus has ceased training in public services.
3. Focus’s head office in Plympton, near Plymouth is led by a managing director who manages 28 staff. Almost all training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Assessors, some of whom are self-employed, are based throughout Devon and Cornwall. Focus has contracts with Devon and Cornwall Skills Funding Agency and government-funded training represents 95% of Focus’s business.
4. Learners are based in the large population centres of Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay, and across the rural areas of Devon and Cornwall. According to the latest figures available, 6.9% of the population are unemployed, which is slightly below the national rate. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups of working age in Devon and Cornwall is estimated at 2%, significantly below the England figure of 13%.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of Focus:
 - Venus Training Consultancy Ltd (health and social care)
 - The College of St Mark and St John Foundation (information and communication technology)
 - Competitive Edge (marketing and sales)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	264 learners 727 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	
Health and social care	2
Retailing and wholesaling	2
Hospitality	2
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

6. Focus is very successful in helping learners to achieve, and the number of apprentices is growing rapidly. Learners enjoy their programmes and a high number of them complete their training successfully, a very large majority finishing within their planned end date. Current learners are making good progress across all programmes. They develop particularly good workplace skills and improve their knowledge and understanding well, increasing their job prospects and helping the businesses they work in. Assessment is highly effective and makes good use of modern technology. Assessors adapt very well to the needs of the learners and their employers. Assessment is very well planned and assessors give prompt and constructive feedback. Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well across the wide geographic area of Devon and Cornwall. Focus's managing director and senior staff provide good leadership which is responsive to the changing and challenging economy in the area. Management of the provision, and of subcontractors, is good. Learners

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feel safe and equality and diversity are promoted well across the company and to employers. Quality assurance arrangements have successfully improved many aspects of the provision, leading to a steady rise in success rates. Focus offers good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good, and they enjoy their training. Success rates have climbed significantly since the last inspection and remain consistently above the national average in all areas inspected. The company's policies, strategy and operational management place a strong emphasis on ensuring learners' success.
- Learners gain good workplace skills. Overall, these are particularly relevant to their employment, and many learners increase their confidence levels and progress well at work. The programme on employers' rights and responsibilities is very successful. Learners gain a good understanding of their employer's policies, procedures and organisation, and understand where they fit in.
- Training, learning and assessment are good. Staff are very experienced and well qualified. Initial assessment has improved and is now used very effectively to plan for learning and assessment. Assessors highlight the importance of health and safety. Training for hospitality and health and social care learners is particularly good.
- Assessment practices are good. Assessors set high standards. They make particularly effective use of electronic methods of recording professional discussion and capturing evidence. Learners benefit from assessors' prompt and constructive verbal or electronic feedback. Witness statements of expert employers are under-used in hospitality and business programmes.
- Progress reviews are satisfactory. Assessors make frequent visits to the workplace to undertake regular reviews of learners' progress. Learners are aware of what progress they are making and assessors set them realistic targets for the next visit. However, the quality of the recording of targets in reviews, assessment plans and individual learning plans varies between assessors.
- Focus meets the needs of employers and learners well. The provider takes care to ensure learners are on a suitable course, and makes opportunities for them to progress to higher levels. Many learners undertake additional training courses relevant to their job.
- Support, advice and guidance for learners are highly effective in all areas except hospitality, where they are satisfactory. Comprehensive induction ensures that learners receive good initial information and advice which aids them in selecting the most suitable programme. Assessors give highly effective advice to learners with personal or professional issues that are adversely affecting their training. Learners facing redundancy derive particular benefit from the strong support which assessors provide.

- Focus's management is highly responsive to the changing and challenging regional economy and has raised learners' achievement rates year on year to above national averages. Over the past year many working practices and systems have been appraised, revised and improved. Detailed data are used particularly well to manage and monitor all aspects of the provision.
- Arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity are good. Focus uses data well to monitor the performance of different groups of learners. Efforts to widen participation from under-represented groups are very successful. The company is highly committed to equality and diversity, and policies and procedures are clear. Staff receive regular update training. Questions asked at learner reviews rarely extend or challenge a learner's satisfactory understanding.
- Focus has developed some very good links with other providers through active roles in local and regional partnerships. It has a good awareness of, and involvement in, local initiatives to meet the requirements of the main funding body for work-based learning. Focus has very thorough arrangements for monitoring the performance of its subcontractors.
- Focus's quality assurance arrangements have successfully improved many detailed elements of the business, but are not sufficiently developed to support broader, longer-term quality improvement. The criteria for judging the quality of assessments and reviews are underdeveloped. The self-assessment process involves all staff, but the subsequent self-assessment report is repetitive and too long. The quality improvement plan is too broad and imprecise and neither are practical improvement tools.
- Value for money is good. Learners make good progress. Their rate of achievement is high and has improved over time. Learners' and employers' views help influence improvements in the quality of provision. Physical resources are generally well managed. The provision is well managed across the wide geographical area in which Focus operates.

What does Focus Training need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the recording of target-setting is of a consistently high quality and helps to motivate learners to complete their programmes at a faster rate.
- Create a concise quality improvement action plan within an annual cycle, to further improve the provision, developed from and linked to a crisp and rigorous evaluation of Focus's key strengths and areas of improvement.
- Produce and apply a set of challenging criteria for evaluating the quality of assessment and reviews.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- their personal improvement in workplace skills and confidence
- the flexible support and good advice from assessors

- the good information and guidance at the start of the course to make sure they are doing the right units
- using the electronic portfolio so they don't have to do so much handwriting
- the extra qualifications they can get while doing their course
- really good support if their job is at risk
- the help with English for learners who speak an additional language.

What learners would like to see improved:

- better explanation of how to use the e-portfolio
- the overly frequent use of jargon.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that Focus is friendly and highly professional
- that Focus meets the needs of their employees and business
- getting their employees trained in the workplace
- the good communication and support from the assessors
- improvements in learners' employability skills, motivation and confidence
- the regular health and safety checks, which keep them alert.

What employers would like to see improved:

nothing identified.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Focus's capacity to improve is good and performance has improved significantly since the last inspection. The company has a good track record over the past two years of business and performance improvement. It has been very responsive to changes and challenges in the economic and funding environments.
8. Focus has revised many elements of its day-to-day systems and processes to create greater efficiencies and improve aspects of practice. Data are used well to monitor and manage all aspects of the provision. Learners' achievement rates on all programmes have risen progressively, are now high and in most cases significantly above national averages. Self-assessment is satisfactory but, while its approach to quality improvement has been generally effective at a detailed level, Focus needs to develop further its approach and methodology for longer-term improvement action planning.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

9. Outcomes for learners are good, and they enjoy their training. They progress well reaching high standards of work. Success rates for all groups have risen significantly since the last inspection and remain consistently above the national average. Rates for success within planned timescales are also high, especially for Train to Gain learners. Business administration learners perform particularly well, especially considering the wide geographic spread of employers. During the last year of the economic downturn, success rates have dipped slightly. As companies have closed, 17 learners have left Focus due to redundancy. Focus has been successful in finding alternative employment for many other learners facing redundancy. Focus's policies, strategy and operational management place a strong emphasis on ensuring that learners succeed.
10. Learners gain good workplace skills. Overall, these are particularly relevant to their employment, and many learners increase their confidence levels and progress well at work. The programme on employers' rights and responsibilities is very successful in raising learners awareness and understanding of work procedures. Learners feel very safe and demonstrate good workplace safety. Focus places a high priority on safety and regularly checks employers for health and safety. Assessors discuss this aspect with learners at each review.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

11. Training, learning and assessment are good. The highly qualified staff use their experience well to develop and enhance learners' knowledge and skills. Focus has improved initial assessment which it now uses very effectively to plan for learning and assessment. Training and coaching are good. Hospitality learners

benefit particularly from the high-quality teaching in advanced professional cookery, and the training in health and social care is highly individualised. Support for literacy and numeracy needs is good. The wide range of electronic resources is well used by many learners, including from home, except in hospitality and social care.

12. Assessment practices are good. Assessors model good practice and set high standards. They make particularly effective use of recorded professional discussion and video recording to capture evidence. Assessors give prompt and constructive feedback to learners either verbally or electronically. Focus makes good use of work-based assessors to maximise assessment opportunities during diverse shift patterns, and for assessing specialist aspects such as complex dishes in restaurants. The use of electronic portfolios is helping to accelerate progress for many learners in business and retail. Witness statements of expert employers are under-used in hospitality and business programmes.
13. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Assessors review learners' progress regularly during their frequent visits to the workplace. Learners know what progress they are making and assessors set realistic actions for them to take by the next visit. However, the recording of targets in reviews, assessment plans and individual learning plans varies in quality between assessors. In business administration, action plans are challenging and many learners progress quickly, whereas in hospitality, targets are not sufficiently individualised, and the learners all work to similar completion dates. Employers are rarely involved in a three-way discussion.
14. The provision meets the needs of learners and employers well. Programmes are well matched to job roles, and provide good progression opportunities between levels and across occupational areas. Good opportunities exist for learners to gain additional certificates such as health and safety, food hygiene, computer-aided design, dementia care, diabetic care, and forklift-truck driving. Assessor visits to the workplace are flexible to fit work patterns.
15. Focus has good relationships with many external organisations, including awarding bodies, the apprenticeship service, Connexions, and local training provider networks. Many partnerships with employers are long standing, and Focus is their training provider of choice. Focus works well with retail employers to map workplace training with the requirements of the NVQ, reducing duplication of training. Where employers have several learners on programmes, Focus sometimes delivers short courses on the employer's premises. Learners in Cornwall have benefitted from European funding to access enhanced technology and job-specific courses, which help to ensure job sustainability.
16. Support, advice and guidance for learners are highly effective in all areas except hospitality, where they are satisfactory. The induction is comprehensive and learners receive good initial information and advice to help them choose the most appropriate programme. Assessors give very effective advice to learners with personal or work issues which are affecting their training. Assessors give

particularly good support to learners facing redundancy to help them finish their qualification and obtain alternative employment. Learning materials are adapted to suit the needs of individuals.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

17. Focus's very effective leaders and managers are highly responsive to the changing and challenging regional economic environment. During the past two years it has had a strong and successful emphasis on raising learners' achievement rates year-on-year to above national averages. It has reviewed, revised and enhanced many working practices. Curriculum management and development are good. All senior staff who manage all aspects of the provision, including individual learners' progress, use comprehensive data routinely and particularly well.
18. The Focus staff team is experienced, well qualified and committed to helping learners succeed. A number of staff are former learners. Staff have good opportunities for developing their skills further. The company uses monthly management meetings and team training sessions well to ensure that all staff are kept aware of business performance and priorities, and are encouraged to contribute their ideas.
19. The monitoring of subcontracted provision is very good. Subcontractors undergo a comprehensive induction. Focus establishes a formal, comprehensive contract and holds a full range of documents from the subcontractor. Quality monitoring is good and includes observation of teaching and checking of internal verifier reports. Focus holds monthly subcontractor meetings concentrating on learner success.
20. Focus has developed some very good links with other providers through active roles in local and regional partnerships. It has a good awareness of, and involvement in, local initiatives to meet the requirements of the main funding body for work-based learning.
21. Safeguarding arrangements are good and meet current legal requirements. Focus maintains a central register of Criminal Records Bureau checks for all staff in contact with learners. Focus has good links with Plymouth unitary authority and maintains a register of local authority contacts across the region it serves. Staff are regularly trained in safeguarding, have a good understanding of safeguarding and give health and safety a high priority. Employers undergo very thorough checks when a learner joins them.
22. Arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity are good. Focus uses data well to monitor the performance of different groups of learners. A small equality team has an effective action plan to address any areas needing development. Efforts to widen participation are very successful, and the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is significantly higher than

that of the local population. Policies and procedures are clear and demonstrate a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Staff receive regular update training. Focus has a good single equality and diversity scheme. Focus's learners receive a thorough induction and a clear workbook on equality and diversity, and they reinforce their knowledge in good employer rights and responsibility training. Assessors ask learners questions at reviews of progress. However, these rarely stretch or challenge a learner's satisfactory understanding.

23. Focus's satisfactory quality arrangements have successfully improved many detailed elements of the process of training delivery, but have not evaluated the overall key aspects of training sufficiently. For example, the system for observing learner reviews and assessment are well planned, but the criteria for judging their quality are insufficient. Written feedback is sparse. The arrangements for collecting learners' and employers' views are thorough.
24. The self-assessment process successfully and productively involved all staff in a day-long event. However, the report is too long, too detailed and repetitive. Inspectors agreed with many of the key strengths, but areas for improvement in the report are scant and some key areas for development are not identified. The subsequent lengthy improvement plan does not link directly to the report. The plan is extremely broad in scope, and frequently imprecise in identifying key actions, responsibilities and timescales.
25. Value for money is good. Learners make good progress across a wide geographical area. Their rate of achievement has improved over time, and is now high. Learners' and employers' views help influence improvements in the quality of provision. Physical resources are generally well managed. Investment in digital media to support and extend learning has been extensive.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

Context

26. A total of 125 learners are working towards qualifications in health and social care. Twenty-nine are apprentices, 44 advanced apprentices and 52 are Train to Gain learners. Much of the training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Venus Training Consultancy Ltd delivers most of the health and social care qualifications on behalf of Focus. Learners are based with employers such as care homes and domiciliary agencies nearly all around Plymouth.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. In 2009/10, success rates for apprentices and Train to Gain learners were above the national average and most apprentices completed within their planned end date. In the current year, the success rates on the Train to Gain programmes have continued to improve and are now significantly above the national average.
- Learners are making good progress. They enjoy developing their care skills and gain a detailed understanding of the needs of vulnerable service users. The standard of learners' work is good, with some of the work at a very high standard. Learners choose the appropriate courses for their job role and undertake a range of additional qualifications.
- Learners feel safe. Health and safety training supports learners effectively in developing safe working practices in a variety of care settings. The provider checks employers' premises regularly and assessors place a strong emphasis on the health, safety and the well-being of learners.
- Learning and assessment are good. Very supportive one-to-one sessions in the workplace are effective in extending learners' knowledge and understanding. Assessors have a high degree of expertise and skills and are up to date in their health and social care practice. Learners appreciate and value this resource.
- The use of technology to assist training is inconsistent. Some learners make good use of electronic portfolios and the virtual learning environment; others do not use these resources at all. The learners undergoing training through Venus Training Consultancy do not have access to electronic portfolios or Focus's virtual learning environment. However, assessors encourage learners to use technology where it is available.
- Assessment is good, regular and consistent. Assessments are well planned and tailored to suit the needs of the learner and employer. Assessors conduct assessments to accommodate the shift patterns of the learners and the needs of the care setting, including domiciliary care. Verbal feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and encouraging. It highlights where the learners can improve and encourages reflective practice.

- The monitoring of learners' progress is effective. Assessors visit the learners in their workplace regularly and conduct reviews. Learners whose progress is slower are well supported through more frequent visits and step-by-step target setting. However, some target setting is too vague and open ended to be of value to the learners.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are highly effective. Assessors are very flexible, approachable and sensitive to the individual learner's needs. Learners value the very good support, in particular when it is available outside of normal working hours. Assessors are contactable by phone and email and will visit learners in the workplace to provide extra support when necessary.
- The management of the health and social care programmes is good. Communication with assessors and workplace supervisors is very effective. Assessors have regular team meetings and one-to-one meetings with their managers. The company produces a monthly staff e-newsletter. Assessors receive a comprehensive programme of professional development.
- Employer engagement is good and includes partnerships that cover a wide range of care settings. Focus has successfully increased the number of learners undertaking apprenticeships this year in response to learners' and employers' needs. The provider makes regular contact with employers through e-newsletters and an employer forum is held every two years.
- The promotion of safeguarding is good. Learners receive training during induction and demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding issues. Assessors discuss these during reviews and observations. Workplaces prioritise safeguarding and demonstrate safe working practices, providing good role models for the learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. During workplace visits, reviews and assessments, discussions place insufficient emphasis on equality and diversity. The promotion of equality and diversity is implicit rather than explicit.

What does Focus need to do to improve further?

- Develop a more consistent approach to the use and availability of technology to support health and social care learners.
- Ensure that target setting in reviews place a greater emphasis on specific short-term goals to support the development of the learners and facilitate their progress.
- Ensure that the promotion of equality and diversity is explicit during visits, reviews and assessments in the workplace.

Retailing and wholesaling

Grade 2

Context

27. Focus has 42 learners working towards retailing and wholesaling qualifications. All are apprentices, with 22 on intermediate and 20 on advanced programmes. The range of apprentices includes 23 aged under 25. All but one of the learners are White British. Learners work in a variety of retail environments from small local shops to large national multiple department stores as far apart as Barnstaple to Penzance.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. A very large majority of learners gained their qualification in 2009/10 and rates were 20 percentage points higher than the national average; almost all learners completed within the planned time. Overall success rates, and the rates for completion within the planned time, have increased significantly since 2008/09. Some learners have had to suspend their apprenticeship on being made redundant by their employer.
- Learners are very enthusiastic and enjoy working towards qualifications that reflect their job roles. Learners attain good job-related skills, knowledge and understanding as they gain new skills. They improve their confidence as they increase their understanding of legislation and regulations relating to retail. Learners and assessors agree realistic short-term targets to maintain a steady rate of progress.
- Significant delays interrupt some learners' training. Some retail managers will not allow assessment to take place during busy trading periods when fewer staff are left to run stores. Redundancies have increased during the economic downturn and Focus works hard to try and find alternative employment for any learner affected.
- Assessors have a good understanding of their learners' success rates. An internal quality assurance system that monitors performance closely provides good information to assessors. Team performance data are shared at effective monthly group meetings and each assessor has an individual meeting with a member of the internal quality assurance team to discuss their individual learners' success rates.
- There is innovative use of electronic learning resources and assessment tools adapted to meet individual learners' needs. Learners value the good guidance, information, work books and mock tests included on a computer memory stick they are given. Assessors provide paper resources as an alternative. Learners make good use of voice files to record evidence, guided discussion, witness testimony and question and answer sessions.

- Effective initial assessment helps learners choose the appropriate qualification. Assessors give learners frequent and constructive feedback to help them extend their understanding of retailing. Progression through levels of the qualification is good and learners gain more responsibility at work.
- The well-developed partnerships with employers help Focus to emphasise business aims and objectives in training. Assessors map the qualification standards to employers' training well. The good planning of learning programmes to accredit existing skills often makes the learner more employable within a shop.
- Assessors give learners effective care and support between visits and encourage learners to raise queries using telephone or email. They stress their continual availability during unsocial hours and this helps learners' progress.
- Focus gives good support to develop staff performance in teaching, assessment and giving advice and guidance. The provider encourages and gives time to assessors to attend training and become qualified in each of the activities they carry out. Assessors set useful targets to learners to research information on the internet about the learner's employing organisation.
- Safeguarding is good and a high priority for Focus. Assessors warn learners, using simple language, of the dangers of social networks. The provider checks employers' procedures, training and premises regularly to ensure the safety and welfare of learners. Risk assessment informs actions that are agreed and followed up, particularly when stock storage areas become cluttered. Small employers value the prompting from assessors to improve their procedures.
- Discussion between assessors and learners during the assessment visits and progress reviews reinforces the understanding of equality and diversity effectively. Staff attend relevant training and introduce this by discussion into the components of apprenticeships. Any learner treated unfairly at work is confident to take action, and is familiar with the appeals procedure and grievance process at work.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive, involving all staff on a day away from the workplace. The emphasis is, however, on the quality improvement plan. This is not sufficiently critical in setting specific actions in the subject area. Assessors share good practice insufficiently, although some sampling of assessments is carried out on a reciprocal basis.

What does Focus need to do to improve further?

- Raise employers' awareness of the value of assessing during busy trading periods while maintaining sales and encouraging learners' progress.
- Develop a process whereby assessors can share good practice more often.

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Hospitality

Grade 2

Context

28. Focus currently has 68 learners on hospitality and catering apprenticeship programmes. Of these, 44 are on intermediate apprenticeship programmes and 24 are on advanced apprenticeships. The majority of learners work towards qualifications in professional cookery and hospitality supervision and leadership. All learners are employed within the hospitality industry, with 55% being women. Employers range from hotels and restaurants to fast food outlets and cafes.

Key findings

- Overall success rates are high. Rates have improved for both intermediate and advanced apprentices. In 2009/10 rates were significantly higher than the national average. Current apprentices are making good progress and overall success rates for 2010/11 are also high.
- The progress made by learners is good. The rate for learners' completion of their programmes on time is good. In the current year, the progress made by learners and their rate of achievement are good. Many learners have progressed from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships.
- Learners develop a good range of skills; these include vocational, knowledge and language skills. Employers recognise these improvements and the increased interest learners have in their jobs. Learners vastly improve their confidence and motivation.
- Assessment and visit planning are good. Assessors plan their visits around their learners' specific shift patterns. Assessors record observations well and learners are provided with clear and constructive feedback. The planning of targets is good with clear items and a good review of performance and how a learner can improve. However, assessors do not routinely follow up some missed targets. Good use is made of head chefs in the workplace to carry out assessment of complex cookery dishes.
- Progress reviews are insufficiently helpful to learners. Targets for learners to achieve between progress reviews do not always contain sufficient detail, nor are they reliably considered at the next progress review. Assessors carry out some aspects of the progress review in a superficial manner and are not reflective of the learners' progress. Individual learning plans and portfolios record targets insufficiently.
- Assessors' use of electronic portfolios to meet the needs of the learners is insufficient. Focus has had some issues with its electronic portfolio; some of the criteria are missing from the requirements of the qualification. The assessor manages the electronic portfolio with little contribution from the learner.

Learners are not confident in using the electronic portfolio and take little ownership of it. Training for learners on the use of the electronic portfolio is ineffective.

- Learning programmes meet the needs of learners and employers well. Focus involves learners and employers fully to ensure that programmes are well matched to learners' needs and suited to employers' requirements. The number of learners on advanced professional cookery qualifications is high. Links with employers are good with regular and effective communication between assessors and employers.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance when starting their learning programme. Assessors make appropriate use of the initial assessment to ensure that learners are on the most appropriate qualification. Induction is effective in enabling learners to understand fully the requirements of the programme and the commitment needed to be successful.
- Support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors arrange their visits flexibly to fit in with diverse shift patterns and employers' needs. Learners can also contact them easily at other times, including weekends. Focus adapts information and learning materials to meet learners' needs. Support for learners with literacy, numeracy and language needs is adequate.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Learners feel safe in their workplace. Focus places a high emphasis on the welfare of learners, especially the issues that may occur in the hospitality industry. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities and use this to good effect towards their apprenticeship framework.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. They form part of learners' induction and are reinforced satisfactorily during training to improve learners' understanding. Learners complete a good equality and diversity booklet during their programme. However, discussion at progress reviews around equality and diversity is superficial. Opportunities for promoting equality and diversity are missed during some visits
- Support and training for staff are good. Regular meetings are a useful method of communication across the dispersed workforce. Training is carried out regularly on topics including safeguarding and equality and diversity. Staff are fully aware of their targets and have regular reviews with their line manager.

What does Focus need to do to improve further?

- Set consistently high quality targets at progress reviews to maintain learners' overall success and progress by ensuring that they can achieve at stages throughout the programme.
- Involve learners more in the management and use of e-portfolios and promote a greater understanding of the recording and cross-referencing of evidence.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

29. Focus currently has 136 learners in business administration and law, of which 134 learners are working towards apprenticeship frameworks and another two are on Train to Gain programmes. All learners are in work and are trained and assessed in the workplace. Learners are employed in a wide range of organisations across Devon and Cornwall, including distribution depots, DIY stores, charities, insurance offices, local and central government, national and local retailers, doctors' surgeries and opticians. Many of the employers are small or medium-sized enterprises.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have improved significantly from a low base four years ago and are now high. Apprenticeship overall success rates for 2009/10 were 14 percentage points above national averages. Train to Gain rates are also above national averages. Success rates for current learners are slightly lower. However, all current learners are making good progress towards their qualifications, and many achieve earlier than planned.
- Learners are developing very good personal and work skills. As their confidence increases, they communicate more effectively with customers and colleagues, and improve their time management. Learners have an improved understanding of their team leading and administration responsibilities and become more job focused. They are gaining good management and customer service skills leading to enhanced job roles and promotions, which in turn improves their economic well-being. Some learners have progressed to other NVQs.
- Learners feel very safe. They understand what constitutes bullying and harassment, and know how to report inappropriate behaviour. They observe procedures designed to protect personal data and financial security. They work safely with computers and dispose of chemicals and computer cartridges which might harm the environment safely. Risk assessments of offices and other work placements are thorough.
- Teaching and learning are good and learners enjoy the training. One-to-one coaching is very effective. Assessor tutors are knowledgeable and learners benefit from enjoyable and interesting discussions to support their development as team leaders and managers. Some learners have developed good research skills to improve knowledge on relevant aspects of legislation. Resources to support learning are good and learners can access these electronically on laptops given by the provider.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory and some is good. The qualified and experienced assessors use a good range of assessment methods to encourage learner participation and to accelerate progress. Professional discussion is used well across all levels of qualifications. Witness testimonies are used insufficiently. Assessors always visit at times convenient to the organisation.

- Target setting is of an inconsistent quality. The quality of the recording of targets ranges from very clear with precise deadlines to the vague and imprecise. Focus has identified this already on several occasions during quality monitoring. All learners are, however, very clear on how to progress due to the frequent and informal support and contact with assessors.
- The training meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. The range of qualifications on offer is good. Employers value highly the flexibility offered by the assessors to respond to the needs of the organisation. Training has transformed learners both in terms of confidence and career prospects. Many learners have achieved more than one qualification and some have progressed from administrative assistants to office managers.
- Good communications and relationships with employers ensure that employer-led training is used effectively to support the ongoing development of learners and their progress towards the qualification. Focus works well with employers and learners to obtain feedback to improve the quality of the provision. However, some employers are insufficiently involved in the detailed planning of training or at progress reviews.
- Support for learners is excellent. Focus staff are highly supportive of the learners. All assessors are easily accessible via email and phone. They give particularly good support to learners facing redundancy. Feedback on assessments and other issues is quick and very effective. Learners trust assessors with work-related and personal problems and if an assessor is unable to resolve a particular problem, learners are signposted to suitable agencies quickly and effectively. Learners who speak an additional language receive very good support to enable them to achieve key skills.
- Internal verification is satisfactory. The process quality assures all assessment and meets all requirements of the awarding body. However, it is insufficient for the quality improvement of the programme, such as ensuring the appropriateness of early assessment planning and the selection of optional units. The internal verifiers offer good technical support to assessors and hold effective standardisation events.
- Management of the curriculum is good. Communications within the team are particularly good. Monthly meetings keep staff, even those based remotely, well informed of any changes. There is a good team spirit and culture of mutual support. Assessor tutors are clear about the performance monitoring that takes place and receive clear rationales to support the allocation of case loads.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners gain a satisfactory understanding at induction. A good learner handbook provides useful information and includes electronic safety features. Staff reinforce these topics at review but this does not always extend or challenge the learner's understanding.

What does Focus need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the consistency and recording of targets is precise in learner reviews.

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- Extend internal verification to assist managers in monitoring the assessment process more closely and in improving course performance further.

Information about the inspection

30. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, their updates, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, the reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
31. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers, but did not report separately on the areas of information and communication technology or warehousing and distribution.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Focus Training (SW) Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners	425	425
Full-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	2	
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	na	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	na	
Quality of provision	2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	na	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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