

Four Counties Training

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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.

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), 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:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. Four Counties Training Limited (FCT) was established in 1993 and is based in Ealing, west London. The company is primarily associated with support for competence assurance and accreditation for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the rail industry. FCT offers advanced apprenticeships in rail transport engineering and engineering maintenance, including specialist areas such as signals, escalators, lifts, traction and rolling stock. FCT also offers apprenticeships in rail transport operations including passenger service, driving and signal operations. FCT runs a Train to Gain programme in the engineering sector at level 2. These are all funded by the North LSC. In addition, FCT provides commercially funded training for the rail and other industries. FCT is the lead partner in the Rail Competence Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE).
2. FCT delivers a total support package to 18 partner employers, from initial learner interview and induction, through assessment and support, to training employers' staff as work based assessors and internal verifiers. Staff from FCT, employers and colleges of further education provide learners with training and assessment. Training and assessment takes place at college and at the provider's and employers' sites, which include depots, factories, trackside and signal centres.
3. All advanced apprentices undertake first year training at employers' training centres attending one day each week at a local college. At the time of inspection, 119 advanced apprentices, 47 apprentices and 339 Train to Gain learners were on programme.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Outstanding: Grade 1

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Outstanding: Grade 1
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding. Leadership and management are outstanding as is provision for equality of opportunity. Teaching and learning, meeting the needs and interests of learners and their support and guidance are outstanding. Provision is outstanding in apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing technologies. Train to Gain provision is also outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. FCT has demonstrated outstanding capacity to improve. The effectiveness of steps taken to improve is also outstanding. FCT has carried out a wide range of improvements across the provision since the previous inspection when it was also judged outstanding. Quality improvement arrangements are highly effective. FCT has very thorough and well documented quality assurance procedures which it implements very well. Actions to improve quality are well considered, detailed and are put into immediate effect. FCT took over a larger provision with very low success rates and is achieving very high success rates with these learners. Overall success rates over the last two years have been very high.
6. The thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process are good, although FCT awarded themselves a lower grade for the provision than that given by inspectors. The self-assessment report is completed annually and its formulation is inclusive, with all staff encouraged to contribute. It is an excellent working document leading to a very effective development planning process. FCT makes very good use of employers' and learners' views to accurately evaluate its services.

Key strengths

- Very high success rates
- Very good development of learners' skills
- Excellent training resources
- Highly effective partnerships
- Outstanding support for staff and learners
- Outstanding leadership and management
- Highly effective quality assurance arrangements
- Outstanding arrangements to support and promote equality and diversity

Key areas for improvement

- None identified

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Achievement on the apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes is excellent. Success rates on apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes in 2006/07, at 91% and 92% respectively, are significantly above national success rates. Train to Gain rates for 2006/07, at 97%, are also outstanding. The previous inspection found that major changes to rail infrastructure and maintenance arrangements, which were outside the control of FCT, lost many learners to the programme. Eighty of the learners remaining on programme following those changes achieved their full qualification. Current in-year success rates are at 85% and rising. Timely success rates for apprenticeships have been adversely affected by FCT taking over a low achieving provision; the success rate for these learners is now very high. The timely success rate for Train to Gain was 87% for 2006/07, and the current in-year rate is excellent, at 92%.
8. Development of learners' skills is very good. Learners are set tasks which progressively develop their occupational skills and knowledge, and written work and portfolio evidence are of a very high standard. Learners work on full size rail projects, developing an excellent knowledge in the operation and maintenance of signalling systems and rail infrastructure. Learners' identification and rectification of rail system faults is excellent. Many training activities involve learners in complex simulation activities which they understand very well and complete successfully. Learners' written and practical work at college is also of a very high standard. Most learners take additional qualifications with some completing an additional NVQ level 3. Key skill achievement is very high. Enrichment activities are good and include outward bound and sporting activities and week long exchanges with other companies.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Teaching and learning are outstanding. On- and off-job training is extremely well planned, co-ordinated and delivered. FCT has excellent and highly effective operational partnership arrangements with employers and other key stakeholders. Employers comment very positively about FCT, and credit them for the very good progress made in increasing the skills of rail industry employees. Great trust is developed through these partnership arrangements and employers are increasingly involved in learners' training and development, continually improving the learners' experience. Employers are fully aware of the learners' skill development requirements and ensure opportunities are available for completion of the NVQ requirements. Knowledge of the apprenticeship framework by apprentices and employers is very good.
10. Resources to support learning are outstanding. Learners benefit from training and operational experience on leading edge operational railway equipment. For example, signal faults are simulated on monitor sections for learners to effectively fault find and repair. Local training centres are equipped to a very high standard and supported with very experienced railway industry trainers. FCT facilities are excellent with portable equipment available to support off site access to assessment. Learners benefit greatly from a suite of DVD learning materials that has been developed to support the rail industry. All learning materials are of a high standard.

11. The needs and interests of learners are particularly well met in all respects. Learners speak highly of the training they receive and employers reflect this view.
12. Recording and monitoring of learner progress is highly effective. Detailed formal reviews take place every eight to ten weeks covering all aspects of the learner programme and framework requirements. Progress with targets agreed from the last review is closely monitored. Any learner not on target is the subject of a case review. An effective action plan is agreed with all parties to ensure a return to planned achievement dates. Learners show an excellent knowledge of their apprenticeship requirements aligned to the rail industry. Assessment, on- and off-job, is closely monitored by FCT. Safety is paramount in the rail industry, learners are regularly assessed to ensure safe working practice in all aspects of their work. Both safety and equality and diversity are thoroughly reviewed, reinforced and developed at progress reviews.
13. Learners receive outstanding support and guidance. All learners are initially assessed and any support needs identified within the two week induction are quickly provided and subsequently monitored at reviews. Learners who transferred from a previous provider are still supported to achieve their framework requirements although they no longer attract funding. Pastoral support is also strong, with learners receiving effective help at all hours. The training manager visits learners at home if appropriate and learners are reviewed on night shift and at weekends. Employers also offer strong support. Learners highly value the support they receive.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory Grade

Equality of opportunity: Outstanding: Grade 1

14. Leadership and management are outstanding. FCT senior management offers outstanding leadership, both within rail industry training and also in its own company. Directors and managers give very strong and clear strategic direction to raise standards of training and apprenticeship recruitment within the rail industry. FCT has developed very good close working links with rail companies, awarding bodies and colleges, participating actively in both national and regional bodies. FCT strongly promotes vocational training and qualifications within the industry and is a significant contributor to the rail industry's national training and development system. FCT has a major influence in bringing nationally recognised qualifications, matched to rail competence training, into the rail industry. Employers speak highly of the impact made by FCT in recruitment and training and the quality of work in assessment, verification and the development of training materials.
15. Management of learning programmes is outstanding. Communication across the organisation is very good. Staff focus clearly on improving the learner experience and success rates. Staff are well qualified and encouraged to develop their skills further. Quality assurance systems are highly effective and internal verification is strong. Regular and frequent meetings take place with the review team to monitor learners' progress; information is transferred on the management information system for all staff to share.

FCT makes very good use of management information, analysing it well to manage performance and produce useful reports on all aspects of their work-based learning.

16. Organisational management within FCT is very good. Staff development is good and links very effectively to the business plan. FCT clearly bases its staff development on the requirements of the business, learners, and the personal development needs of staff. Staff attend a wide range of relevant training programmes and events. Induction of staff is good. FCT uses well structured staff meetings to share good practice, inform staff on a wide range of relevant subjects and gain useful feedback. FCT manages resources very effectively to support learners' training. Staff are well qualified and experienced.
17. A quality improvement culture is owned and demanded by managers and staff. This is exemplified by the inclusive and very effective assessment process. FCT carries out regular, detailed audits of its quality assurance procedures. It regularly collects the views of learners and employers and uses these effectively to improve services. The quality of the whole learner experience is monitored closely through tight working relationships with partner organisations, regular reviews and the monitoring of partners' own quality processes.
18. Literacy, numeracy and language support is managed very effectively. FCT has a well established strategy, clear policies and effective procedures. Effective systems are in place to assess all learners. Those who need it receive good and very effective support; however, staff do not always fully record all the support learners receive.
19. Arrangements to support and promote equality and diversity are outstanding. Equality of opportunity permeates strongly through the whole organisation. All systems and processes are thorough and effective. All staff undertake thorough equality and diversity training and their understanding is good. FCT supports its staff very well. Learners receive comprehensive and challenging equality and diversity training and staff reinforce this particularly well at progress reviews.
20. At senior level FCT has a major influence on the equality and diversity strategies of client employers. FCT works very effectively with client employers to target recruitment at under-represented groups. Over the last year females recruited into the engineering apprenticeships have risen to 13%. The number of apprentices recruited from black and minority ethnic groups has risen significantly to 23%. FCT is working with a major rail company to bring the long term unemployed into the rail workforce. FCT is providing assessment and basic skills training to give adults with no prior qualification the skills required to enter the industry. Achievement and success is recognized and celebrated regularly, for example with award events and articles in rail industry publications.

What learners like:

- 'The programme is really enjoyable'
- Integration of learning and work
- Training facilities
- Support from employers
- Support and guidance from reviewers
- Additional qualifications
- 'Having my skills recognised'

What learners think could improve:

- 'Amount of paperwork should be reduced'

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced apprenticeships	06-07	overall	46	93%	64%	91%	58%
		timely	49	55%	43%	51%	37%
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	13	100%	51%	92%	39%
		timely	13	100%	29%	92%	22%
	05-06	overall	12	83%	58%	83%	52%
		timely	12	67%	38%	67%	34%
	06-07	overall	12	92%	65%	92%	61%
		timely	12	75%	47%	75%	44%

* 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	06/07	overall	141	97%
		timely	126	87%