

Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51895

Name of lead inspector: Julia Horsman HMI

Last day of inspection: 12 July 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider
Francesco Group House
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Address:

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Information about the provider

1. Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd (Francesco Group) is the training provision of the family owned hairdressing group, based in Stafford since 1967. It has 32 hairdressing and retail salons. The majority are franchised and located in six counties across central England. The Francesco Group has around 500 staff, including three directors; 70 staff are based in Stafford. It has a Skills Funding Agency (SFA) contract for apprenticeships. It offers full-time hairdressing courses in partnership with Stafford College, is a hairdressing consultant to 11 other colleges, has 14-16 schools' provision with five schools, and 10% of its work is from fee-paying learners attending specialist hairdressing courses. This inspection is only of the SFA contract, involving 91 apprentices and 48 advanced apprentices, forming 30% of the overall provision.
2. Currently 43% of learners are from non-Francesco Group salons, a major change from the previous inspection in 2006, and a notable increase since 2010. Learners from Francesco Group salons and 10 independent salons within 60 miles attend the Stafford academy, five apprentices attend the Arden Academy in Knowle and a minority have all their training and assessment based in their salons. Geographically further away, the eight Scissors salons in Dorset and seven West Row salons in the Leeds area each represent 12% of the provision. The proportion of male learners is average for the hairdressing industry, whereas numbers of learners from minority ethnic groups are low.
3. The work-based team includes a manager/internal verifier, three trainers/assessors, two administrators and around 40 salon-based assessors. The academy training manager and administration manager oversee all four aspects of the academies' training provision and report to the managing director.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	67 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Hairdressing	2

Overall effectiveness

4. The overall effectiveness of the Francesco Group’s provision is good. Learners develop excellent hairdressing and customer service skills. A high proportion of learners have achieved their qualifications consistently within the expected target dates during the last three years. In 2010/11 learners having additional learning support achieved much better than other learners and the national rates. The vast majority of advanced apprentices consistently achieve their qualifications. Learners enjoy their training. Standards of creative and technical hairdressing skills are very high. Learners assist at national shows, exhibitions and photo-shoots. They also enter national and local competitions.
5. Learners enjoy working in the high quality training academies. They work alongside particularly good hairdressing role models, in high quality salon environments, with excellent resources. Academy sessions are good and some, both theory and practical are outstanding, although a minority is satisfactory. The majority of salons have assessors working as stylists enabling learners to make good use of naturally occurring work-based evidence. Attendance at additional hairdressing courses can be negotiated with employers so learners can widen their range of hairdressing skills as well as having extra practice and assessment.
6. Training is clearly at the heart of the Francesco Group, in developing business growth and sustaining high quality. The group’s approach for maintaining

quality is to partner only with high quality commercial and creative salon groups. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Recently introducing barbering skills and African-type hair work broadens learners' skills and is aimed at increasing participation by males and learners from minority ethnic groups. Since the previous inspection the Francesco Group has increased its salon partnerships, while successfully maintaining the identity of the individual salon groups. Quality assurance arrangements across the new larger and more geographically dispersed provision do not fully inform detailed actions for quality improvement.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Overall success rates and the proportion of learners completing by their target end date have been above national rates for the last three years. Advanced apprentices success rates are excellent, and since 2009/10 significantly above national rates, especially so for completing by their target end dates. Apprentices' success rates improved greatly in 2009/10, then dropped to around national rates in 2010/11 and are rising again in 2011/12.
- Mathematics functional skills results at foundation level have improved and are high in 2012 for learners' first attempts. Mathematics intermediate level awards results are good. In 2010/11, learners who received additional learning support, including readers in examinations, achieved high success rates, which were much better than other learners and the national rates. Success rates for male intermediate apprentices in 2010/11 dropped to near the national rates.
- Learners have exceptionally high levels of communication and interpersonal skills which enhance the quality of clients' salon experience and meet the high expectations of clients in their work place salons. Very well designed client consultation sheets used in training sessions support the development of eloquent and confident consultation and conversation skills. These skills are valued by employers. Learners use safe working practices.
- Learners' commercial hairdressing skills are good, and some are outstanding. Their competition skills are exceptionally good for their time on programme. Excellent senior staff inspire learners through their high level awarding winning skills. Learners use high quality products confidently. In the Midlands' academies they can attend motivational presentations related to, for example, organising and completing a successful photo shoot.
- Teaching and learning in the Midlands' academies are good with some outstanding sessions. In the better sessions, learners are challenged with ambitious tasks, enthused and engaged in learning by highly knowledgeable and skilled trainers who relate theory to practise effectively. Satisfactory teaching is most frequent in theory sessions, and is characterised by too little checking of learning, too few visual images and use of less effective learning strategies.
- Learners benefit from the good range of enrichment activities extending their skills and knowledge. They complete additional hairdressing courses in creative,

technical and reception skills, attend product seminars, shows and exhibitions. Pin badges are awarded through a reward system, which learners wear proudly in the academy. Completion, early in their programmes of an award in prevention of dermatitis reinforces health, safety and personal care.

- Francesco Group's partnerships are strong in the provision for its college full-time and its 14-16 schools' programmes. Learners benefit from progression within the group both into work-based learning and into full-time provision. This is particularly beneficial for recently unemployed learners. Around 100 Midlands school pupils annually have work experience organised by the Francesco Group, enabling them to make more informed career choices.
- Learners receive good curriculum-related care, support and additional learning and assessment opportunities. Intermediate apprentices have a designated mentor in their salon to provide support and guidance in the first year of their programme. Initial assessment makes insufficient use of information about learners' prior attainment and experience in planning their learning, and some complete assessments before targets for these are set.
- Francesco Group's leadership strongly promotes high aspirations and clearly communicates the expectation of its brand, culture and ethos. Hairdressing staff training is highly motivational. Communications are good. Meetings between staff are useful in monitoring learners' progress but target setting is incomplete and does not always provide sufficient challenge to improve. Data interrogation is insufficiently detailed to fully inform improvements.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good and meet government requirements well. A designated person and a panel of trained staff are known to all learners. Training events and updates usefully inform staff of changes and improvements to policies. Training is offered to employers and clear signposting information for learners extends their understanding. Safeguarding issues are identified routinely and several learners have been assisted very effectively.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Induction, progress reviews, discussions and in-salon mentoring are used for effective promotion and reinforcement. The introduction of barbering and African-type hair into programmes and a review of recruitment practice are aimed at increasing the participation by males and learners from minority ethnic groups.
- Quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently effective for evaluation to fully inform specific and detailed actions for quality improvement so they can be easily communicated across the enlarged provision. Some aspects are over-reliant on informal processes. Internal verification and contract data management are satisfactory.
- Francesco Group provides good value for money. Learners' success rates overall are consistently high. It invests heavily in training resources, accommodation and facilities that help to motivate learners to achieve. Learners quickly develop high professional standards and are supported by innovative technology and up-to-date methods to best prepare them to offer treatments to clients with high expectations.

What does Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Review and analyse the reasons for the drop in success rates for intermediate apprentices and address the underlying causes.
- Develop inspiring and challenging teaching and learning strategies for the delivery of theory subjects by providing additional support and guidance for teachers.
- Raise learners' awareness of equality and diversity, particularly through naturally-occurring opportunities in group discussions and client sessions.
- Improve the initial assessment process to better inform the planning of individual learning by including a stronger focus on hairdressing prior learning, experience and attainment as well as personal attributes and academic achievement.
- Develop effective strategies to increase the proportion of males and learners from minority ethnic groups by researching good practice in training providers and by challenging salon teams to suggest practical ideas to implement in their salons.
- Strengthen the quality improvement processes by ensuring that robust, formal and comprehensive quality assurance arrangements are fully implemented and contribute to clear judgments in a self-assessment report and to specific detail in the quality improvement plans. Ensure challenging targets are set, monitored and evaluated so key strengths are maintained and improvements made.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- clear explanations by trainers and lots of individual help
- the very high standards of training and hairdressing skills in their salons and at the Francesco Group
- that all trainers are friendly and treat them as adults
- the training materials used at academy sessions and the information which is readily available on the Francesco Group learner portal for use at any time
- that academy staff are interested in their learners and check that they feel safe at their salons and the academy
- training that combines nationally recognised hairdressing industry qualifications along with the obvious high quality Francesco Group's training.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more support for functional skills development
- increased attendance at the academy; more than twice a month is needed
- to go into more depth with theory relating to practical work
- more clients for work-based learners at the Stafford Academy
- a more challenging pace, as courses could be completed in shorter timescales
- more feedback on academy sessions to the salons
- the volume of theory work to be completed all at once.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- all aspects of training in the Francesco Group
- the excellent standard of support and training with positive feedback from apprentices
- the excellent support received from head office, whose staff are always at the end of the telephone when needed
- the points and traffic lights monitoring and reward systems, enabling employers to check learners' progress and identify where any extra support is needed
- the high quality training by professional hairdressing trainers using excellent salon resources which reflect employers' own salons
- training meetings which are really helpful to share ideas, voice opinions and keep up to date with any changes to course requirements.

What employers would like to see improved:

- better advice and guidance for recruiting good apprentices
- more help to re-allocate apprentices so they can finish their training if a salon cannot continue to employ them.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

7. The Francesco Group has a clear vision for its company in recognising that its success is dependant on high quality hairdressing and service beyond the expectations of its clients. Leaders and managers communicate high aspirational goals to learners, staff and partners very effectively, which has inspired them to professional excellence. As reported at the previous inspection in 2006, the training provision has maintained very good development of learners' commercial skills, outstanding additional training opportunities and particularly good learning environments. Since the previous inspection, overall success rates have gradually improved and have been well above national rates for the last three years, in particular for learners completing within their planned deadlines. Advanced apprentices success rates have been outstanding for three years.
8. The grade for capacity to improve reflects that of leadership and management as, despite the outstanding outcomes of learners having been maintained, the 2011/12 self-assessment report was insufficiently well informed by quality assurance arrangements. It has some key strengths which are over-stated and/or reflect normal work-based learning practice. The self-assessment report format does not show the areas for improvement clearly enough and the action points in the quality improvement plan have insufficiently specific detail for easy communication across the whole provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

9. Overall success rates are high, above national rates for the last three years. Advanced apprenticeship success rates are excellent and in 2010/11 were at 94% which was 15 percentage points above national overall rates and 28 above rates for completion in the planned time. In 2010/11 intermediate apprentices' success rates declined to 69%, six percentage points below national rates, but remained above national rates of 65% for completion by planned target dates.
10. Functional skills achievements are high for learners' first attempt which significantly improved in 2011/12 to 82% for foundation level mathematics from 53%. At intermediate level, which was introduced in 2011/12, achievement is 73%. English results are not yet available. Success rates were high in 2010/11 for learners who received additional support and well above national rates for completion by planned target end dates.
11. Male advanced apprentices success rates for completion within target end dates have consistently been well above national rates for four years. Success rates within planned timescales for male intermediate apprentices in 2010/11 are 4 percentage points below national rates. Six of the ten achieved their apprenticeship framework and the remainder left the programme early without

completing it. Four successfully progressed onto the 2011/12 advanced apprenticeship programme.

12. Learners enjoy training with the Francesco Group and are proud to be associated with it. Many learners' levels of commercial and competition skills are outstanding for their stage on the programmes and some go to exciting venues to support senior staff at shows and exhibitions. When competent, learners work alongside top stylists to assist in key aspects of hairdressing treatments as well as having their own clients at regular weekly training sessions at their salons.
13. Learners participate in a wide range of fund-raising and charity events, and have an excellent role model in their managing director. The Francesco Group glossy news publication circulated across the organisation and to clients, celebrates these successes well. Some salons are particularly keen to support fund-raising with key themes relating to personal interests and hairdressing.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

14. Learning sessions in the Midlands' academies are good with some being outstanding. Learners are challenged with ambitious tasks. For example, a very innovative cut and colour task, which built on intermediate apprentices' prior learning, involved team work, replicated commercial salon-work and included complex colouring techniques. Visual prompts help learners to relate theory to practice and learning is checked regularly by highly conscientious trainers. In weaker theory lessons, learning strategies are uninspiring and fail to sufficiently challenge learners.
15. Learning environments in the academy and in salons are of a high quality. Learners confidently use high quality products. Client consultation sheets used in training sessions are excellent and have enabled learners to develop very eloquent and confident consultation and conversation skills by the cleverly phrased key points to use as prompts. Technology in the Midlands' academies is used effectively to support learning. For example, professionally produced and very relevant DVDs are played on electronic tablets to reinforce cutting techniques while learners are completing an associated haircut. Employers and learners benefit from using the Francesco Group portal to download timetables, achievement reports and stream videos.
16. Excellent staff role models inspire learners and enrichment opportunities are good. Many of Francesco Group academy trainers and some other salons' staff are extremely successful in very high profile national competitions, exhibition shows and business awards. Learners' career aspirations are enhanced by opportunities to apply for the salon art team, where mentors help them to refine highly creative skills and motivational presentations. In addition, all learners can compete in free reward-based activities, with coveted 'pin' badges to wear at the end of each component and rewards of additional training

courses to enhance their skills above their course requirements. Early in their programmes, the prevention of dermatitis qualification is taken by all learners helping to reinforce health and safety precautions.

17. Initial assessment processes make insufficient use of information about individual learners' prior learning, attainment and experience, in planning their learning and setting targets. While a minority of apprentices take a twelve month fast track programme, others are given 18 months without sufficient credit for achieving relevant hairdressing awards and/or competence gained through extensive work experience. Some learners achieve components before targets are set for these and while achievement is recognised and recorded on the tracking system, it reinforces that targets are insufficiently individualised.
18. Francesco Group partnerships are strong between the apprenticeship provision and its college full-time and 14-16 schools programmes. Learners benefit from the progression within the academy group both into work-based learning and out, into full-time provision. This helps some learners affected by unemployment.
19. Learners receive good curriculum related care and support. Supplementary academy sessions are available for, and used by, learners without trainers in their own salons. Additional assessment opportunities at the academy and in the work place are provided to ensure learners keep on track and meet their targets. Intermediate apprentices have a designated mentor in their salons to provide support and guidance in the first year of their programmes.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

20. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leaders share their vision for high quality professional hairdressing very well. The strong commitment to aspirational expectations is well communicated and understood. Business growth is sensitively managed to ensure that new employers' identity and brand is maintained. Communications are good. Staff meetings are useful in monitoring learners' progress, but actions to improve, and targets, are often incomplete or insufficiently informed by data and information analysis and evaluation. Performance management is satisfactory. Professional development opportunities in hairdressing skills are highly motivational.
21. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. Policies and procedures, ensuring staff and learners are aware of safeguarding matters, are effective and reviewed annually. The designated safeguarding person and his deputy are known by all learners. Induction content, leaflets and reinforcement during progress reviews, ensures learners' understanding of safeguarding information, including cyber-bullying. Staff and salon employers have received safeguarding training which is good for increasing awareness across the workforce. Training and support staff have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks, which are recorded in a central register and updated in line with company policy.

22. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Discussions using the glossy induction booklet and care and guidance leaflets and through the salon mentor role and progress reviews, promotes and reinforces key points. Good reinforcement and exploration of diversity relating to hairdressing takes place in some learning sessions. Recruitment of male learners in 2010/11 was high at 29% for intermediate apprenticeships, although generally it is around national averages. Recruitment of learners from minority ethnic groups is low and the strategic promotion of African-type hair into programmes is aimed at increasing participation. Learners receiving additional learning support in 2010/11 had high success rates, well above the comparator national rates.
23. Quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently effective for evaluation to inform detailed and specific quality improvement planning and communicate this easily across the enlarged provision. The very high focus on assuring the high standards of practical training contributes strongly to the high outcomes for learners. Academy staff know learners well and carefully monitor progress in regular team meetings. Internal verification is satisfactory.
24. The Francesco Group provides good value for money. Most learners achieve their apprenticeship qualifications within the planned time. They gain skills and confidence that equip them admirably for the commercial aspects of business. Sustainability is given a high profile in learners' training. For example, use of web-portal communications instead of paper and posting; the choice of resources to minimise the carbon footprint; minimising product wastage and in the use of recycling. Significant investment by the provider and partners in high quality resources, products and accommodation supports learning and aspirational goals very well. Innovative additional learning opportunities are well used to reward, motivate and benefit learners.

Information about the inspection

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's academy training manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plan, the previous inspection report, the report from the inspectorate's 2010 interim assessment and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed about the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews, including visits to observe group sessions at the Stafford, Knowle, Leeds and Bournemouth academies and in salon work-places. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Francesco Group (Holdings) 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		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	139	139
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	1	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1	
Quality of provision	2	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	3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
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?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
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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