



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 1999

Francesco Group Holdings Limited

SUMMARY

Francesco Group Holdings Limited provides good-quality training in hairdressing. Training and assessment are well planned. Trainees have opportunities to undertake additional professional training. Trainees have regular progress reviews and the salon trainers and centre assessors are involved in these. The company upholds and promotes equal opportunities but it does not monitor equal opportunities statistics. There is no regular use of accreditation of prior learning. Communications within the company are good. Support for trainees in the company's salons is good but it is less satisfactory in some non-Francesco salons. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process and were well informed about it. Quality assurance systems are incomplete and they are not systematically evaluated.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training and assessment
- ◆ additional professional training opportunities for trainees
- ◆ involvement of salon trainers and centre assessors in trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ high level of staff awareness of self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunity statistics
- ◆ no systematic use or accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ insufficient support for trainees in some non-Francesco salons

INTRODUCTION

1. Francesco Group Holdings Limited (Francesco) is a limited private company which provides training in hairdressing. Trainees also have the option of studying for a second qualification in customer service. The nucleus of the business is the administration bureau/head office, situated in the centre of Stafford. Adjacent to the head office is the Francesco Group Hair Academy. The company has 20 hairdressing salons for trainees' work-based training. The salons are situated throughout the counties of Staffordshire, the West Midlands, Shropshire and Cheshire. Franchising was introduced in 1983, and currently 16 salons are franchised and four are owned by the company. The company contracts with Shropshire and Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). For the purpose of the inspection, Staffordshire was the lead TEC.

2. At the time of the inspection, Francesco had 99 trainees pursuing National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3, and customer service at level 3. The company has no sub-contracting arrangements, but acts as a consultant to a local further education college.

3. The Staffordshire labour force survey shows there are 660,000 persons of working age in the county. The unemployment rate in Staffordshire is 4 per cent compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. Less than 3.8 per cent of the population in the county are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

4. The economy of the West Midlands is heavily reliant on manufacturing industries. Economic forecasts by TECs in the area suggest that the manufacturing industries may experience some recession over the next year. Exporters of manufactured goods have been enjoying reasonable growth, but this is expected to fall off as they face fierce price competition. It is also expected that economic activity in the service sector may be slowing down. Sectors enjoying strong growth are business services and telecommunications.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Francesco produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. Staff at all levels of the organisation were involved in its production. Inspectors agreed with the grades in the self-assessment report for hairdressing, equal opportunities, trainee support, and management of training. They awarded a lower grade than that given for quality assurance.

6. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine inspection days at the provider's premises during February 1999. Inspectors met with trainees, trainers, managers, employers and a TEC representative. They interviewed 22 trainees and 23 members of the company staff, visited nine work placements, observed four training sessions and one trainee progress review.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Hair & beauty		3	1			4
Total		3	1			4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hairdressing

Grade 2

7. The 99 trainees in training at the time of inspection were working towards NVQs in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3, with the option of studying for a secondary qualification in customer services. There were five trainees on national trainee programmes, and 94 on modern apprenticeship programmes. Trainees attend the training centre for two consecutive days every month. Qualified assessors carry out assessments in the centre. Training at the centre covers both practical and theory aspects of the programme. Trainees are visited in their workplace every 12 weeks, when their progress is monitored. Trainees' results have been steadily improving over the past three years. In 1996, the pass rate for hairdressing NVQ level 2 was 60 per cent and by 1998, it had increased to 63 per cent. The pass rate for NVQ level 3 improved from 50 per cent in 1996, to 63 per cent in 1998. All trainees achieving a level 3 NVQ have also gained a level 2 NVQ in hairdressing. There were similar improvements in the results over the same period for customer service NVQs; the pass rate for these rose from 50 per cent in 1996, to 63 per cent by 1998. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. The report failed to mention any weaknesses. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses which the company had not identified and they agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training and assessment
- ◆ incentive system for Francesco-salon trainees
- ◆ high-quality resources
- ◆ additional professional training opportunities for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessing key skills
- ◆ no work-based assessment

8. Training is carried out by well-qualified staff at the company's purpose-built, specialist academy in the centre of Stafford. All trainers have relevant assessor awards; some also have teaching qualifications and all have good current practical skills. The hairdressing salons used for practical sessions are spacious, light, airy and well designed. They are equipped to a high commercial standard. Trainees also use good quality consumables produced by well-known manufacturers. However, the room used for theory work has no windows and is cramped. The provider is currently seeking planning permission to make considerable improvements to the accommodation. In addition, the provider intends to extend the premises when adjacent buildings become free. There is a resource room with textbooks, learning aids and videos available for trainees' use. Information technology equipment is to be installed this year.

9. There is a detailed annual training plan which clearly identifies theory and practical work for each training session. Trainees and trainers in the workplace receive a copy of this plan at the commencement of the programme. Trainees have a clear picture of how they will progress through each unit, and when they will be introduced to new skills. The plan includes details of practical assessments, theory tests and projects. Trainers have an overview of the progress of trainees in the group and the trainees themselves can identify their own achievements accurately. The plan is designed to allow all trainees to begin working towards the same unit at the same time. The scheme has sufficient flexibility to allow the needs of individual trainees to be met as the training progresses. There are detailed plans for each training session, with clearly identified objectives, methods of delivery and identified learning resources. Trainees enjoy the theory sessions and find them interesting. They work together on activities which are supported by a wide variety of teaching aids. Trainees know from the beginning of the programme which key skills have to be covered, and can exemplify those that are relevant to their programme. However, key skills are not introduced into the programme until year two. Trainees then gather evidence of their attainment in key skills by carrying out hairdressing-specific assignments. Evidence of their performance in key skills, obtained through naturally occurring situations in the first year of their programme, is not used for the purposes of NVQ assessment.

10. Francesco-salon trainees' progress is measured against a merit star rating system. Merit stars are given for a high level of practical and interpersonal skills within the workplace and at the training centre. To gain a star, the trainee must demonstrate competency in a specific area. To gain their fourth star, for example, trainees have to spend a week working in another Francesco salon; this tests their ability to work with a new team and also their interpersonal skills. Details of the progress of all trainees are displayed prominently within the centre, and trainees wear badges to indicate achievement, from one to five stars. Work-based trainers record trainees' progress; and this is also discussed as a regular agenda item at management meetings.

11. Trainees are encouraged to take up additional training opportunities. There are in-house training sessions in advanced techniques, such as colouring and cutting; which are led by well-known manufacturers, or members of the company's artistic team. Regular visits take place to national shows and competitions. These events help to motivate trainees and instil in them a keen desire to succeed. The provider is anxious to ensure that trainees are not only competent, but also confident on completion of their training, and has introduced an additional training dimension for them. Depending on their individual ability, trainees attend additional training towards the end or on completion of their programme. This is through attendance at the 'finishing school', where trainees are able to work with the company's artistic director to improve their skills and progress onto more advanced work.

12. Assessment targets are identified within the annual training plan and they are given to trainees at the start of their programme. All trainees have an action plan for assessment within their portfolios. Target dates are set for completion of assessed work and these are varied for individual trainees according to their ability. The trainer monitors trainees' progress carefully and informs reception which type of models will be required for each trainee's assessment. If trainees' work falls behind target, they receive additional training, and trainers visit the salon to assess them in the workplace. However, no assessment is carried out by work-based trainers, even though some are appropriately qualified and have indicated a wish to be involved in assessing trainees. Trainees' progress is carefully monitored and assessment is well organised. The trainees take little responsibility for monitoring their own progress, however.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

13. The concept of equal opportunities is defined in an updated company policy. The importance of equal opportunities is emphasised in the trainees' induction pack. Procedures for grievances and complaints have recently been added to the pack and they are issued separately to all staff and trainees as part of their contracts of employment. Promotional materials have been updated to ensure that they do not present stereotypical gender images. Male stylists and managers who have

progressed through the company are used as role models, and are fully involved in recruitment and promotional activities. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, although they found additional strengths and weaknesses which the company had not identified. The grade awarded by the inspectors was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ recently updated equal opportunities policy
- ◆ effective grievance and complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities statistics in relation to recruitment
- ◆ no specific action to raise employers' awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ no recent staff training in equal opportunities

14. The company has had an equal opportunities policy for some years and has recently updated it. The company sought appropriate professional advice in drawing up its updated policy. Equality of opportunity is regularly discussed at senior management meetings in the context of overall strategic planning. Management is continuously seeking to improve the company's promotion of equal opportunities. For example, it recently identified that staff and trainees needed to be more aware of the complaints procedure. A separate grievance and complaints procedure has now been introduced and distributed as an addition to all staff and trainees' contracts of employment. Trainees know whom to contact within the company, should they have any complaint or grievance. The equal opportunities policy is actively promoted throughout the organisation and is displayed prominently in various areas of the training centre and in all the Francesco salons. In those salons not owned by the company and where no equal opportunities exists, the centre has provided a modified version of its own policy for general use. The induction programme covers equal opportunities training and includes a copy of the policy. There is no formal consolidation of this training later in the programme. Trainees are aware of the basic principles of equality of opportunity, however, and they are able to discuss them in terms of treating others with fairness and respect, regardless of their gender, race, religion, age or marital status.

15. There has been no recent training or updating for staff related to equal opportunities. Staff and employers were able, however, to cite examples of good anti-discriminatory practice. Staff have no specific training to develop skills to enable them to support trainees with physical or mental disabilities. Employers' and supervisors' upholding of equal opportunities in the work placement salons is not systematically monitored. Most employers are unfamiliar with the detailed requirements of the company's equal opportunities policy. Teaching and learning materials are not monitored to ensure that they promote equal opportunities and

some contain examples of stereotypical gender roles. The updated policy is fairly recent and there has not yet been any formal evaluation of its effectiveness. Documentation on trainee recruitment meets TEC requirements in terms of monitoring equality of opportunity. The company has not carried out any systematic analysis of recruitment data to inform planning of any initiative to attract trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes.

16. Historically, hairdressing is a predominantly female occupation. Of the company's trainees, 20 per cent are male, compared with a national average of 13 per cent. Male staff and trainees take part in promotional and recruitment activities. In order to widen participation on programmes, the company provides supplementary training in specialist areas. For example, men's barbering is offered at the training centre, and Afro-Caribbean hairdressing is available in two of the Francesco salons. If trainees are interested in specialising in these areas, they can be referred for additional training, at an appropriate point in their programme. Non-Francesco employees can also access these programmes.

17. Currently, part of the training centre is inaccessible to wheelchair users. However, the company's strategic plans for growth and improvement include the adaptation of premises to make them accessible to the disabled. For example, when company salons have been refurbished, they have been made accessible to people with limited mobility. The company promotes the 'positive about disabled' symbol for people with physical disabilities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

18. All trainees undertake a comprehensive induction programme, which prepares them for training and employment. Trainees' receive pastoral support and also guidance to help them to achieve their goals. Trainees' progress is monitored through regular review sessions and additional support is provided, as necessary. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and, in addition, identified some further strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by the inspectors was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' regular contact with salon trainers
- ◆ involvement of salon trainers and centre assessors in progress reviews
- ◆ provision of extra training days
- ◆ celebration of trainees' success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to take results of initial assessment into account in individual training plans

- ◆ no recognition or accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ no end-of-programme counselling

19. A comprehensive induction package is available to all trainees and includes an overview of the programmes and target qualifications, NVQ assessment procedures, employment terms and conditions, health and safety, and equal opportunities. Recently, the company identified that some trainees could not recall the content of the induction programme. They are now given a post-induction test questionnaire and this is followed by a second one about two months later.

20. During induction, all trainees undergo an initial assessment of their basic skills. The assessment test has been upgraded, but does not specifically test key skills, which are a requirement of the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes. The results are marked and an action plan is devised, where appropriate, to improve trainees' basic skills. The test results and the action plan are not, however, recorded in the trainees' individual training plans.

21. Trainees are well supported by the centre's assessors, who work closely with the salon employers. Each salon has an appointed in-salon trainer who has clear responsibility for a number of trainees in the salon. Time is allocated for the salon trainer to provide extra training for each trainee to practise on models. The salon trainers provide continual coaching and support, and assume responsibility for their trainees' progress and well being. Details of the training provided are recorded in the salon review documentation and given to the centre assessor with the aim of strengthening the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training.

22. Individual progress is monitored through three-monthly progress reviews which take place in the salons and include contributions from salon trainers, centre assessors and the trainee. The trainees' progress in the off-the-job training at the centre is discussed and compared with progress made in the salon. During this process, areas where the trainee needs further training or experience are identified and appropriate action is discussed and agreed by all concerned. The review process includes NVQ target setting, which is recorded on the trainees' individual training plans. Any additional support requirements, identified as a result of review, are met by training in the salon, or additional training days at the centre. This extra training can include key skills training, practical experience, or practice on models for assessment at the centre, as required.

23. Trainees' achievement is celebrated. Certificates are presented with pride and the ceremony involves employers and parents/guardians. Prizes are awarded to trainees who excel, through a 'trainee of the year' award scheme. This is based on a scoring system for professionalism, appearance and achievement. Trainees are encouraged to participate in annual in-house competitions, which are of high profile and receive national publicity.

24. The company has no arrangements for accrediting the prior learning and

experience of trainees who have had work experience in the salon or who have worked in salons on a Saturday, sometimes over several months. Many of these trainees are capable of completing basic tasks such as preparation and shampooing of clients satisfactorily, but there is no accreditation of their prior learning. Trainees completing the programme fill in an evaluation questionnaire, but there are no planned counselling interviews to enable trainees to find out about further progression opportunities available to them, or future career prospects.

Management of training

Grade 2

25. The organisation has clear purpose and direction, and in its vision statement, it gives a high profile to customer service basis. The management structure is clear and well defined. The management team is led by an executive director and comprises three management staff, each with responsibilities for key areas of training. Management places great importance upon the continuous improvement of provision and is implementing planned and well-thought-through changes carefully. The management team has found the self-assessment process positive and beneficial. Staff are well motivated, and there is an appraisal system which is firmly linked to staff development. The past three years have seen a significant improvement in trainees' retention rates. In 1996-97, modern apprenticeship and training credit early leavers averaged 42 per cent; by 1998-99, this proportion had fallen to less than 11 per cent.

26. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the management of training which were cited in the self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths which the company had not identified. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear sense of purpose shared by all staff
- ◆ clear understanding of roles and responsibilities on the part of staff
- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ effective and well-structured administrative support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no objective analysis of evaluative information
- ◆ poor non-Francesco employer involvement
- ◆ no systematic contribution from staff to the business plan

27. The company's vision statement is prominently displayed in the salons and training areas. It is well designed and incorporates a promotional symbol, which attracts the reader and assists marketing. The vision, with its strong focus on the importance of good customer service, is central to the determined sense of purpose

shared by all staff and trainees. The enthusiasm of staff is self-evident. Staff are highly motivated by the sense of pride they have in the vision set out in the statement, and they see it as central to the success of the business of which they are a part.

28. Staff have clearly defined key roles and they fully understand both their responsibilities and their lines of accountability. Staff are able to focus meaningfully on the essential elements of their work, and they are firmly aware of their responsibility to be effective in all that they do. Managers perform their line-management functions well. They work closely with other relevant staff, in order to provide them with good support and encouragement. They are keen to promote improvement based upon clear objectives.

29. There is an effective and well-organised staff appraisal system. The company's salon trainers receive performance and career reviews every quarter and there are six-monthly reviews for staff at the academy, which is, in effect, a specialist training room adjoining the head office. The monitoring of staff development courses has three stages: pre-course analysis of potential individual and business benefits of the training; immediate post-training evaluation; and analysis of the longer-term impact of training over three months.

30. Good communications at the training centre are a strong feature of the organisation. Staff use good communication skills and are articulate and confident at both formal and informal levels. There is good teamwork and co-operation among staff. Staff meetings take place regularly, the most important of which is the monthly profile and quality assurance meeting. Administrative support is well organised and effective. It is managed by a co-ordinator who has other wide-ranging responsibilities, including trainee recruitment, housekeeping of the training facilities, and a role in maintaining trainee profiles and handling claims. This manager and the quality co-ordinator maintain compliance with TEC contracts. They are able to produce valid trainee statistics which relate yearly to trainee cohorts, showing equal opportunities data and key performance figures for early leavers, achievers and those still in training.

31. There are currently over 10 separate questionnaires which are used to gather feedback from trainees about aspects of provision. Most are concerned with trainees' experience, perceptions and understanding of training. The information which is collated from trainees' responses is not used in any systematic action-planning to improve the quality of training. It is up to the discretion and initiative of individual members of staff to use it in the way they think best to improve the company's provision. There are no procedures whereby management is able to receive and consider data resulting from evaluation, and co-ordinate subsequent planning for improvement. Basic data on the trainee profile are used to inform management and are accurate, but are limited to the type of information needed to support TEC requirements.

32. The company has designed a small number of measures to give non-Francesco employers the benefits of its training services. It issues invitations to free technical and professional training courses. There is regular communication and a good

rapport with these employers. Non-Francesco employers, however, have little opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the company's strategic development.

The training staff have little scope to contribute to, and influence the company's business plan. It is difficult for them to relate easily to it because the plan relates to the wider business interests of the Francesco group as a whole. Their involvement in the implementation of the plan centres on their responsibility for helping to fulfil the objectives which relate to training.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

33. The formal and comprehensive inclusion of quality assurance procedures within the quality manual is currently in the process of development. Francesco meets the external quality assurance standards required by Staffordshire TEC and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE), with which it has contracts. The TEC financial audits have confirmed the provider's low-risk status for the last four years. TEC performance league tables rate the provider among the top five providers in all categories. Quality assurance arrangements also meet awarding body requirements. Feedback is regularly sought from trainees and employers about the quality of training provision and the extent to which it meets their needs. Francesco achieved Investors in People status in 1995 and was re-recognised for this in 1998. The Investors in People assessment identified particular strengths in the company's furtherance of staff career development and the importance of the star rating system as a means of recording and rewarding trainees' achievements. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in quality assurance which were cited in the self-assessment report. They found weaknesses, however, which the company had failed to acknowledge. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ internal monitoring of external verifier visits
- ◆ high level of staff involvement in the self-assessment report
- ◆ standardisation of workplace training
- ◆ quality spot checks

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete quality assurance systems
- ◆ no systematic review of quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ insufficient feedback from leavers

34. Staff are able to keep themselves up to date on quality assurance matters by their attendance at events such as courses and conferences. Visiting external

verifiers in hairdressing, customer service and key skills are formally observed at key stages of their verification. Discussion and feedback with the verifier are formally recorded in minutes produced by a company director. These minutes are used to inform and raise action points at profile and quality assurance meetings.

35. Training staff were involved in compiling the self-assessment report. The self-assessment process, led by the executive director and the quality co-ordinator, included the specialist contribution from key staff at meetings especially set up for the purpose. Other evidence for the report was generated through the profile and quality assurance meetings, and salon trainers discussed self-assessment and inspection within the trainers' club. All staff were kept well informed of the requirements of the inspection process through formal communication channels. The self-assessment report was thorough, and the statements of strengths were well detailed.

36. Practical training methods in the Francesco salons have been standardised through the development of programme support for trainers. The star-rating system encourages trainees to produce work of high quality. Trainers regard the system as an important one in ensuring a consistent approach to training across the salons. Observation and monitoring of in-salon training sessions take place and are recorded on an observation sheet. Trainers share good practice within the trainers club. They also have comprehensive support documentation and additional materials to assist them in applying standardised training.

37. Evaluation of non-Francesco work-based training has also been carried out to check that the quality and content of training meet the training programme requirements.

38. Directors arrive unannounced at a trainee's workplace to carry out a quality spot check. Their activity provides a valuable addition to routine monitoring of quality. The spot checks are effective in checking that high standards are consistently maintained and as they are carried out by senior personnel, they are taken seriously by staff and trainees alike.

39. The index of the quality manual is drafted in a temporary format, pending the progressive development, and completion of, a comprehensive quality assurance system. Quality assurance procedures for recruitment of staff, induction, appraisal and professional development are not formally documented. The main rationale for the quality assurance manual is that it will help staff who are covering for absent colleagues to maintain high standards. The company displays information about procedures and standards for essential aspects of provision, such as health and safety, through high-profile posters and notices.

40. Review and updating of quality assurance arrangements have until now, been carried out in response to external requirements and developing needs within the organisation. This led to action plans for improving resources and training methods. However, there are no formal procedures for the systematic review of the quality assurance arrangements in order to complete the quality cycle, and to ensure that all



aspects of the company's provision are duly considered and evaluated.

41. When they leave, trainees are asked to answer an evaluation questionnaire and give details of their destinations. They can return their responses anonymously after the final presentations at the end of their programme, but some trainees fail to do so. There are no arrangements for analysing trainees' responses and taking action on them. The information about leavers and their destinations which management receives is insufficient to be of significant use in future planning.