

# The Fashion Retail Academy

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 57839

Name of lead inspector: Richard Beaumont HMI

Last day of inspection: 11 December 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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## Information about the provider

1. Fashion Retail Academy (FRA) was opened in 2006 as a joint venture between the Government and the fashion retail industry. The Academy is based in the centre of London, close to Oxford Street. The curriculum was developed with the support of the fashion retail industry and The London College of Fashion. FRA contracts with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in Central London. Most of the income generated by FRA is from the LSC.
2. In 2008/09, FRA recruited 434 learners onto full-time LSC-funded courses from level 2 to level 4. Seventy-five per cent of these learners are 16–18-year-olds. Just over 20% of all learners are from ethnic minority groups. Half of all learners live within London boroughs and the remainder are from the home counties and beyond. All learners undertake work placements.
3. FRA is managed by a small senior management team and employs approximately 50 staff, most of whom are part time. FRA's mission is to work in partnership with the retail industry to deliver professional and vocational training programmes that equip learners with the skills and talents required by the industry in a contemporary learning environment. FRA has not been inspected before.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to18)	319 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	101 full-time learners

## 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 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Retailing and warehousing	2

## Overall effectiveness

4. The overall effectiveness of FRA is good. The governors and Principal provide clear leadership to meet the needs of learners and employers. They have managed effectively the introduction of new programmes and quality work placements. The initial aims and objectives as set out by the partners have been secured. The Academy management is now at full complement and is in a good position to improve those aspects it knows to have not yet fully delivered. Over FRA's first three years in operation, overall success rates have improved by 10 percentage points to 75% in 2008/09. This does not include very low key skills success rates. Progression into employment is high and employers are particularly pleased with the high standard of learners' work skills. Learners are highly motivated and enjoy the training. FRA has good capacity to improve further.
5. Industry partnerships are outstanding and there is a good range of industry standard learning resources. While teachers are effective in developing learners to meet high and demanding industry standards, many of them have insufficient knowledge on how to deliver good teaching and learning sessions. Quality assurance arrangements are poor and there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity.

## Main findings

- Success rates are very high for learners on level 4 programmes. For adults on level 2 and 3 programmes, success rates are high. For level 2 and 3 learners aged 16 to 18, success rates are satisfactory. Key skills success rates are consistently very low.
- The development of learners' work skills is very good. Expectations are high and learners deliver. At the end of their programme they are work ready and well motivated. The progression rate of learners into employment is high.
- The range of and access to industry standard learning resources are good. Work placements are well managed and form a key part of the learning process. Teachers have good industry experience. Retail resources at the Academy are of a high standard.
- Assessment practice is challenging and highly effective. Many learners deliver at a level higher than the programme they are on.
- Industry partnerships are outstanding. The support of key fashion retail leaders has been a major influence on the success of FRA. Working relations are well established and developing further. Learners benefit from a range of partnership initiatives.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers motivate learners well. However, many of them lack the knowledge to develop their teaching above satisfactory.
- Leadership has been effective and has delivered the initial aims and objectives. Governors are well matched to FRA needs. The senior management team is now established and is starting to improve the provision. Access to timely management information is under-developed.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. All staff have or are in the process of completing enhanced disclosure checks. Learners feel particularly safe. Staff have sufficient knowledge but there has been limited training of staff.
- Equality and diversity arrangements are satisfactory. Policies and procedures are clear. Data are analysed but the impact of action to reduce success rate variations between minority groups has been limited. Learners know their rights and where to complain. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity.
- Feedback from users to improve performance is satisfactory. However, quality assurance arrangements are poor. For example, the monitoring and improving of teaching and learning is under-developed. Key skills have consistently been a key weakness.
- The self-assessment process is recently established and overall is satisfactory. The self-assessment grades matched those of the inspection team and the findings were broadly in line. The quality improvement plan links well to self-assessment, although actions for improvement lack measurable targets.

## What does The Fashion Retail Academy need to do to improve further?

- Significantly improve key skills success rates by ensuring that learners complete the portfolio in a timely manner.
- Recognise and address the needs of individual learners through robust initial assessment and in the planning of lessons.
- Improve the monitoring of progress and support arrangements for level 2 learners to improve retention.
- Set individual and challenging learning and personal targets at the beginning and during the programme. FRA and learners to develop these together.
- Extend learners' understanding of equality and diversity through improvements in the planning of the curriculum.
- Further develop and use timely management information to monitor and improve performance.
- Improve quality assurance arrangements, in particular the monitoring and support for teaching staff.
- Clearly define actions in the quality improvement plan by means of measurable targets.

## Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

### What learners like:

- the really exciting practical course
- making good progress and being job ready
- gaining more confidence
- teaching staff that know their subject
- the location of FRA in the heart of fashion retail
- strict rules which reflect real life
- feeling well supported all the time
- the safe environment
- the facilities, common room, library and canteen.

### What learners would like to see improved:

- timetable scheduling
- action taken to manage learners who are unfocused and who distract lessons
- extend FRA's opening hours
- the length of lead-in time for work-placement interviews.

## Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

### What employers like:

- the level of commitment from Academy staff
- vocationally very relevant and at the end of their programme learners are work ready
- the well-managed work placements.

### What employers would like to see improved:

- the range of programmes to include a graduate programme
- similar provision in other UK cities
- the number of learners who join the retail sector.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

6. FRA has a clear vision to meet the needs of users to a high standard. In three years, FRA has successfully developed and introduced four fashion retail programmes from levels 2 to 4. These have delivered success rates from at least satisfactory to very high. The introduction of the level 4 programmes in 2008 was particularly well managed. Links with major fashion retailers have improved further over time and now include over 50 high street brands wanting to work with FRA. The employment opportunities for learners training at FRA are very good. Teaching staff have particularly good knowledge of the industry and motivate learners to achieve high standards.
7. FRA accepts that its efforts have been much focused on developing training to meet the needs of industry and that aspects of the provision have been slow to develop. However, the management structure is now established and starting to action areas for improvement. The self-assessment grades match the inspection team's and the findings broadly match. The quality improvement plan is closely linked to self-assessment. However, actions for improvement lack clear and measurable targets.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Overall, in three years, success rates have improved by 10 percentage points to 75%. In 2008/09, success rates at level 4 are very high at 87%. Success rates for adult learners at levels 2 and 3 are high at 78% and 80% respectively. For learners aged 16–18, success rates at levels 2 and 3 are satisfactory at 70% and 75% respectively. Key skills success rates are consistently very low. Over the past three years, overall key skills success rates have been 2%, 9% and 11%. Many learners pass the test but fail to complete the portfolio. FRA has recently introduced improved ways for learners to achieve their key skills, although it is too soon to judge the impact. Learners from non-White British backgrounds do not achieve as well. Overall, White British learner success rates are 20% above those of other learners.
9. The development of learners' work skills is very good. They apply their knowledge particularly well to a broad range of fashion retailing scenarios. For example, fashion buying, range planning and customer service. FRA and employers have high expectations and most learners respond well. Learners very much enjoy their time at FRA and improve their confidence and social skills considerably. Learners develop particularly good industry-related information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Progression rates into employment are high at all levels. Learners feel particularly safe at FRA. Attendance rates are satisfactory.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 2

10. The range of and access to industry standard learning resources are good. Teachers' experience and knowledge of the fashion retail industry is very good. They enforce current industry standards and expectations in all aspects of training. Work placements are well organised and integrated into the learning programme. They are a valuable contribution to the development of learners' knowledge and skills. Retail resources and ICT facilities are good and meet industry standards. The library is well stocked with a wide range of relevant publications and books.
11. Assessment practice is challenging and highly effective. It develops learners' vocational and work-based skills to a high level. Assessment criteria set out clear expectations to ensure learners understand what is required of them. The standard of learners' work is often higher than the level they are studying.
12. The standard of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the better lessons a range of short and imaginative learning activities take place. ICT is often used to great effect. However, in too many lessons there is insufficient variety of teaching methods to challenge all learners. Sessions are often too teacher led. The planning of lessons generally does not take into account an individual learner's starting point with regard to prior attainment, experience or learning needs. While the teachers have good subject knowledge, approximately half of them are not teacher trained.
13. Learning support arrangements are satisfactory. Learners in receipt of additional support achieve at least as well as other learners. However, the identification of additional learning needs varies between learners at the enrolment process. Other than a few learners with the necessary prior GCSE maths and English achievement grades, learners on the level 2 course study the same level key skills, regardless of their actual level or ability.
14. The Academy has outstanding industry partnerships to meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. Learners benefit from a variety of excellent support from many high street retailers. Work-placement arrangements are good. Fashion resources are regularly supplied and updated to the Academy for learners to practise with. Master classes and attendance at the celebration of learners' success include prominent industry figures. Financial bursaries are available and learners successfully competed in international industry-led competitions. Careers opportunities are good as learners have direct access to employers.
15. FRA offers a complement of full-time programmes to allow learners opportunities to progress from level 2 to level 4. FRA works with a few organisations to develop pupils where school has not proved successful. The FRA website and recommendations from family and friends act as the main marketing tools.



16. Advice, care and guidance are satisfactory. Recruitment is managed well and ensures that learners are on the appropriate course. Tutorials are satisfactory with learners feeling well supported. However, the setting and monitoring of learners' individual targets at the start of and during the programme are limited. Although online personal learning plans have recently become available, they are not fully implemented.

## Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. FRA has set a clear vision to meet the needs of learners and the fashion retail sector. All those involved in the Academy have high expectations and by working in partnership with major retail organisations, initial aims and objectives have been achieved well. The Principal offers good leadership and direction. The senior management team is now established and key areas for improvement are starting to be actioned. The introduction of two level 4 programmes has been particularly successful. The governing body is well matched to the needs of FRA's strategic aims. However, the development of some aspects of the provision has been slow to improve and timely and accurate management information to monitor and improve performance is poor.
18. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. Policies and procedures are appropriate and regularly updated. Enhanced disclosure checks on all staff are held on a central list. A senior manager is responsible for safeguarding and staff are aware of the safeguarding reporting requirements. Learners receive clear advice and guidance prior to work placements on staying safe. Staff at FRA respond well to learners' welfare concerns. Learners feel particularly safe at FRA. However, few staff have been trained in safeguarding, although plans are in place.
19. Overall, arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory. Policies are routinely updated and procedures made clear to staff. The ethos of equality between learners and staff is good. Financial support funds are available for learners where access to the Academy or work placements may prevent their attendance. The level of marketing to attract learners who represent either industry or community groups is satisfactory. FRA has started to work with a range of local organisations to widen participation. Access to the Academy for learners with limited mobility is good.
20. Learners have satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities and managers take prompt and appropriate action in cases where complaints have been made. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity. There are few examples where staff in lessons or tutorials actively plan to extend learners' understanding, either within the context of retail or beyond. FRA's approach to monitoring learner group data is satisfactory. Data are collected with regard to gender, age and ethnicity and are generally understood by senior managers. However, there has been little impact on narrowing the success rate gap between White British and other minority groups. There is insufficient equality and diversity training for all staff.

21. FRA's links with users to improve performance are satisfactory. There is good communication and feedback from employers about work placements. Feedback from learners is satisfactory. Learner representatives have good access to staff and regular questionnaires monitor learners' understanding and satisfaction levels.
22. Quality assurance arrangements are poor. Quality assurance policies and procedures are not fully developed. The internal observation of teaching and learning is not inclusive of all staff. The criteria for and records of internal teaching and learning observations are insufficiently robust and generally lack clear actions for improvement. Arrangements to support new staff are not sufficiently established. Any actions to improve consistently low key skills success rates have had little impact. The sharing of best practice is not fully developed. Staff have a reasonable understanding of and involvement in the recently established self-assessment process. The quality improvement plan links well to the findings of self-assessment. While the grades awarded by FRA in the self-assessment report match those of the inspection team, the main findings vary.
23. Overall, value for money is good. FRA's management of resources is good. Staff have good links with industry and they use their knowledge and expertise particularly well to the benefit of learners. Outcomes for learners are good.

## Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and data on learners and their achievement since the provider contracted with the LSC in 2006.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gather the views of learners and employers. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the Academy. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes the provider offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Fashion Retail Academy**

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	14–16	16–18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	420	0	319	101	0
Part-time learners	0	0	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	2		2	2	
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2		2	2	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
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>	-				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3				
Quality of provision	2		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?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	3		3	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>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
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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