

Francesco Group (Holdings) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

28–31 March 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that apprentices undertake a sufficiently challenging framework that supports them to develop their English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills according to their potential.
- Governors, leaders and managers do not scrutinise the performance of the provision sufficiently in order to identify and address areas for improvement.
- The opportunities for apprentices with low levels of prior academic achievement to join the apprenticeship programme are restricted.
- The written feedback apprentices receive following assessment is not sufficiently clear on what they need to do to improve their practical skills.
- The monitoring of apprentices' progress is not sufficiently rigorous to identify the gains they make from their starting points.
- Staff and apprentices do not have a sufficiently thorough understanding of fundamental British values, nor do they understand fully the wider risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.

The provider has the following strengths

- Francesco Group (FG) instils in staff and apprentices well-established values such as integrity and commitment which apprentices display when dealing with customers.
- Leaders, managers and staff promote a culture that fosters hairdressing creativity and talent in their apprentices.
- Well-qualified and experienced teaching staff in the academies carefully plan and manage hairdressing theory and practical lessons well.
- Apprentices' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good because they develop excellent hairdressing skills and knowledge.
- Apprentices receive good support and encouragement from staff and employers to develop their skills to a high standard.
- Staying-on rates are high, and apprentices enjoy learning the hairdressing component of the framework.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Francesco Group (Holdings) Limited is the training provision of a family-owned hairdressing group, based in Stafford since 1967. It has 39 hairdressing and retail salons. The majority are franchised and located in eight counties across central and southern England. Francesco Group has approximately 500 staff, including five directors. The apprenticeship programme operates from three academies, based in Stafford, Birmingham and Poole. FG offers full-time hairdressing courses as a subcontractor from Newcastle Stafford Colleges Group, is a hairdressing consultant to 13 other colleges and delivers part-time provision for apprentices aged 14 to 16 with one school. Some 10% of its work is from fee-paying apprentices attending specialist hairdressing courses. The area in scope for this inspection is the apprenticeship provision delivered at FG's three academies.
- Currently 43% of apprentices are from salons which are not part of the Francesco Group – the same as at the previous inspection in 2012. The proportion of male apprentices at 11% is average for the hairdressing industry.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of those exercising the role of governance by ensuring that they thoroughly scrutinise the performance of the apprenticeship programme and use this information to challenge leaders to improve the provision.
- Ensure that apprentices make good progress and achieve well in English, mathematics and ICT, by:
 - reviewing the functional skills strategy to ensure that it is comprehensive enough to meet the development needs of all apprentices, including the most and least able
 - providing suitable training to ensure that all staff are confident and skilled to deliver interesting and challenging lessons in English and mathematics that keep apprentices motivated.
 - developing the means to monitor apprentices' gains in English, mathematics and ICT; capturing their starting points and progress towards achieving their goals on time.
- Develop the effectiveness of the processes used by leaders and managers to evaluate and improve the provision, by:
 - analysing a wider range of apprentices' performance indicators to inform a robust understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship programme
 - ensuring that quality action plans are sufficiently detailed and measurable and address all identified areas for improvement.
- Build further the knowledge and understanding that staff, employers and apprentices have of fundamental British values and aspects of safeguarding such as the risks associated with exploitation, radicalisation and e-safety.

- Provide apprentices with more frequent written feedback that gives them clear advice on how to improve their practice when working with their employers in the hairdressing salons where they are based.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders' and managers' emphasis is almost exclusively on the hairdressing elements of the apprenticeship and they have not focused on ensuring that the provision meets the broader skills needs of apprentices in English, mathematics and ICT since the previous inspection. FG does not recruit learners with low prior academic achievement in English or mathematics, irrespective of their practical skills, aptitudes and ambitions for a career in hairdressing. The strategy for functional skills is not sufficiently comprehensive to meet the current needs of all apprentices.
- Leaders and managers do not routinely analyse data to enable them to evaluate the provision accurately; for example, to identify any differences in the achievement experienced by those apprentices not employed by FG. As a result, their self-assessment of the learning programme is insufficiently critical and, in several areas, overgenerous.
- Quality improvement plans are not sufficiently specific and do not address key areas for improvement; neither do they include appropriate targets and milestones. This limits leaders' and managers' ability to make rapid improvements across the provision.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced in relation to their vocational expertise and the large majority have teaching qualifications. However, some trainers do not have the knowledge or the skills required to support the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills.
- Leaders and managers have taken appropriate actions to improve achievement rates at the newly acquired training academy. They have rigorously applied performance management measures to secure consistently high standards in the vocational delivery of hairdressing skills and knowledge. Furthermore, an experienced manager has recently been appointed to lead the improvements on teaching, learning and assessment. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this.
- Leaders and managers share a common vision to support apprentices to reach excellent standards in their hairdressing skills. As a result, apprentices develop very high levels of competence in hairdressing technical skills and knowledge. Leaders display ambition for their apprentices by nurturing their creative talent and supporting well the staff and employers with whom FG works.
- The provider instils in staff and apprentices appropriate values such as commitment, loyalty, respect and integrity. These are evident in apprentices' attitudes to their own work and the relationships they form with customers in the hairdressing salons.
- Leaders and managers have continued to build on their strong relationships with local employers and hairdressing industry groups. As a consequence, apprentices have access to pioneering hairdressing techniques and comprehensive and up-to-date information with regard to careers advice.
- Managers and staff track apprentices' progress well in terms of the vocational, hairdressing element of the framework and they use this information effectively to plan assessment opportunities. Almost all apprentices make good or better progress with the hairdressing element of the framework.

- Managers conduct frequent and useful lesson observations; their feedback to staff from these has helped to maintain the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in relation to hairdressing, since the previous inspection.

The governance of the provider

- Those exercising governance, such as FG's shareholders, have put in place rigorous and effective processes to ensure the financial viability and sustainability of the learning programme.
- However, governors do not scrutinise the performance of the apprenticeship programme sufficiently and, as a result, they have an incomplete picture of the strengths and areas for development of the provision. This reduces their capacity to hold managers to account and to support them to improve.
- Leaders and managers do not receive ongoing impartial challenge from governors to help them to drive up standards and to continue developing the quality of the provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Apprentices feel safe and are safe in learning and work settings. Apprentices and staff demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practices.
- Apprentices develop their awareness of safeguarding well during induction and throughout the programme by assessors' reinforcement of this topic. However, staff and apprentices have not yet developed a sufficiently broad understanding of the indicators of radicalisation or other forms of abuse.
- Staff are well trained in a number of different aspects of safeguarding, including in relation to child sexual exploitation. However, a few employers have not undertaken training in relation to the 'Prevent' duty.
- Leaders and managers acknowledge that they have made slow progress in complying with a few of the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. For example, although leaders and managers have planned to deploy more effective internet search filters to prevent apprentices accessing extremist material online, these are not yet in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Trainers and assessors do not take account of apprentices' prior knowledge, skills deficits or intended learning goals when planning and reviewing the learning of English and mathematics. Trainers use learning resources and deliver activities in these subjects that are undemanding and fail to inspire apprentices.
- Too much written assessment feedback from trainers lacks sufficient detail for apprentices to know how to improve further their English, mathematics and hairdressing work. Verbal feedback is more helpful but trainers and assessors do not always capture it to help apprentices to remember and reflect on what they need to do. Trainers and assessors do not routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work or provide advice on how to make improvements.

- The monitoring of apprentices' progress does not provide a full and accurate overview of the gains they make during their programme from their starting points. As a result, apprentices and employers are not clear about the progress made with the apprenticeship or how much they need to do by their planned end date.
- Trainers carefully plan and manage hairdressing theory and practical lessons well. Detailed session plans provide good structure and pace to the lesson and establish challenging learning objectives. Trainers and assessors set high standards and expect apprentices to aspire to excellent hairdressing skills. They skilfully coach apprentices to refine their technical skills and competently show how theory relates to practice.
- Trainers are skilled in using technology to enliven lessons and apprentices use it widely for independent learning to help them consolidate what they have learned and to undertake further research. Apprentices enthusiastically use interactive digital technology during theory lessons and use effectively a well-designed interactive virtual learning environment to learn independently outside the classroom. However, trainers do not support apprentices to develop their ICT skills further for business purposes.
- Trainers' assessment of the hairdressing skills developed by apprentices is well organised, thorough and directly linked to the on- and off-the-job training. Regular and frequent reviews, accompanied by additional assessment visits, assist apprentices in making good progress. Employers make useful contributions to evaluating apprentices' hairdressing performance and setting targets. However, trainers do not routinely ensure that they include English and mathematics skills in these activities.
- Apprentices receive good support, encouragement and expertise from trainers, assessors and employers, which ensure that their hairdressing skills are of a high standard. Support for apprentices to achieve their main qualification is good.
- Apprentices enjoy a variety of additional opportunities to extend their hairdressing skills and knowledge. They attend useful events such as London Fashion week and visit leading hairdressing product academies to add to their sales and customer service training. Most apprentices have the opportunity to attend a finishing school to learn from FG's artistic directors, as well as taking part in many advanced technical training sessions.
- Trainers use good-quality hairdressing teaching and learning resources. Experienced and well-qualified staff, who are also confident teachers and talented stylists, serve as good role models to apprentices who are employed at high-quality salons. In the academies and salons, apprentices have access to a wide range of products and equipment that enable them to practise a particularly extensive array of hairdressing services.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices develop excellent technical hairdressing skills and knowledge, becoming confident and self-assured of their own abilities. They exhibit hairdressing skills which reflect high industry standards and demonstrate creativity and innovation in all aspects of their vocational skills.
- Apprentices' attendance at academy sessions and in the workplace is very good; they are continually motivated to learn new techniques and develop good attitudes to work.
- Apprentices demonstrate positively FG's ethos of producing high levels of technical skill, creativity and commercialism and benefit from the very high expectations set by leaders,

managers and trainers. The development of workplace skills such as professional behaviour, client care and creative technical skills is very good.

- The use of mobile technologies supports apprentices well with the development of their creative skills. For example, taking photographic evidence of their practical work for portfolios, and using videos on creative techniques online to learn new skills. Consequently, they demonstrate fluency in the use of technology, but do not develop their wider ICT skills further.
- Apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance, with local salons acting as helpful career access points in the local community. They benefit from undertaking work experience prior to starting an apprenticeship and from a thorough assessment of their existing practical skills and their commitment to training. As a consequence, apprentices make well-informed career choices and most complete their programme.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of the health and safety risks associated with the use of hairdressing products and practices, which tutors appropriately reinforce during the programme. For example, apprentices have a heightened awareness of the risks of eczema and contact dermatitis. Despite feeling safe at FG and at work, many apprentices do not develop a sufficient and robust understanding of fundamental British values, the risks associated with exploitation and radicalisation and e-safety.
- Apprentices have strong technical skills and develop good speaking and listening skills, communicating effectively with customers; however, they do not receive the appropriate learning and support to improve their reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, they make slow progress in developing these skills further. This fails to prepare them sufficiently well for their future careers or lives outside of work.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Apprentices make very good progress in the development of their hairdressing skills during their learning programme, considering their starting points. However, they are not progressing sufficiently well with the development of other employability skills such as English, mathematics and ICT.
- Achievement rates at FG are high and considerably above the national average rate, but this is against the background that the framework they deliver is not sufficiently challenging for all apprentices. Last year, only a few of the recruited apprentices doing an intermediate apprenticeship needed to undertake a qualification in English and mathematics as they had already achieved a GCSE in school in these subject areas.
- Furthermore, the very few apprentices who take English and mathematics qualifications do not achieve well. Too many apprentices receive insufficient support to help them pass their tests and, as a consequence, over half of them failed to pass their English and mathematics tests in the allocated time, last year.
- In the cases where apprentices already have a qualification in English and mathematics, they receive insufficient encouragement to improve their grades or to achieve a higher-level qualification, thus limiting their chances to progress in their studies within hairdressing or other chosen careers.
- The number of apprentices who achieved their apprenticeship framework qualifications has greatly improved in the last two years with the very large majority of the apprentices

achieving their framework. However, fewer apprentices are achieving their framework within the planned time and this requires improvement.

- Too many variations exist in the way different groups of apprentices perform. For example, last year, apprentices aged 16 to 18 years and those undertaking an intermediate apprenticeship did not achieve as well as other apprentices. On the other hand, the achievement gap is closing between males and females.
- Apprentices' staying-on rates on the programme are high across all academies. Apprentices thoroughly enjoy their learning and take pride in their hairdressing practical work. They tackle complex haircutting and colouring techniques which they very ably demonstrate in national hairdressing competitions where a good number of apprentices achieve well.
- The standard of practical work produced by apprentices is of a high quality. Apprentices use their flair, imagination and dexterity well to produce work that is considerably over and above the standard that is required of them to complete their qualification.
- The large majority of apprentices retain employment within Francesco Group or at one of the independent salons, on completion of their learning programme.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51895
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16 to 18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	168
Principal/CEO	Ben Dellicompagni
Telephone number	01785 236961
Website	www.francescogroup.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	67	6	64	17	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of education, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Maria Navarro, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Jacqui Deane	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Prest	Ofsted Inspector
Gareth Fallows	Ofsted Inspector
Denise Olander	Her Majesty's Inspector

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