

INSPECTION REPORT

Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd

07 September 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd (FG) opened its first salon in 1967 in Stafford, and currently has 30 retail salons in Staffordshire, the West Midlands, Derbyshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. FG's head office and two training academies are in Stafford.
2. The provider contracts with Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide training in hairdressing for 99 learners, of whom 73 are advanced apprentices and 26 are apprentices. Learners taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 3 progress to FG's finishing school before they begin taking clients in the salon on a commercial basis.
3. The senior management team consists of the executive director, the training manager and the administration manager. The executive director is responsible for business development, company financial policies, marketing and equal opportunities. The training manager is responsible for planning training, quality assurance, staff development and internal verification, and works with the quality manager, an assistant manager and two full-time trainer/assessors. The administration manager is responsible for contract monitoring, data, recruitment, learner support and quality assurance, together with two full-time and two part-time administration staff.
4. The provider works in partnership with Walsall College of Arts and Technology, Derby College and Wolverhampton College. Stafford College subcontracts with FG to train 135 full-time students. Stafford College was inspected earlier this year. FG also offers privately funded training and scholarships for adult learners who are unable to access government-funded training. The publicly funded training provision constitutes around half of the provider's total business.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Leadership and management and the contributory areas of quality improvement and equality of opportunity are all good. The provision in hairdressing is outstanding.
6. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is generally inclusive, although the employers were not all fully involved. The self-assessment report broadly reflects the inspection findings. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.
7. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** It has made significant improvements since the previous inspection and dealt with the weaknesses identified at that time. Some areas that were weaknesses are now strengths.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR FRANCESCO GROUP (HOLDINGS) LTD:

- continue to raise learners' overall success rates
- continue the good partnership working
- maintain the outstanding provision in hairdressing
- establish a more comprehensive approach to quality improvement
- further develop the management information systems
- improve the monitoring of equality of opportunity

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Retail and commercial enterprise			1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Hairdressing</i>		1	
Apprenticeships for young people	99	1	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection took place over 12 inspection days and involved three full-time inspectors. Hairdressing was reported on and graded under the retail and commercial enterprise area of learning.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	28
Number of staff interviewed	25
Number of employers interviewed	9
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	10
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	2
Number of visits	1

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- strong leadership that promotes learning
- very good programme development and progression opportunities
- exceptionally good partnerships
- good range of strategies to develop learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- good support to remove barriers to learning
- well-developed quality improvement system for training and development

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity data
- insufficient evaluation of the quality improvement process

Retail and commercial enterprise

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good and improving success rates
- very good development of learners' commercial hairdressing skills
- outstanding training
- good learner progression
- outstanding additional training opportunities
- particularly good learning environments
- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment to plan individual learners' targets

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT FRANCESCO GROUP (HOLDINGS) LTD:

- the accessibility of staff
- the support in the salon
- the training is very organised
- 'the programme, college is fantastic, training is brilliant'
- 'the trainers are all friendly and give help and support'
- 'I like the fact that it is different to school'
- 'I like it because you are part of a family'
- 'I like colouring - the training is so thorough and clear'
- 'I like the hands-on nature of the course - it's tactile'
- 'it's a perfect type of learning for me'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK FRANCESCO GROUP (HOLDINGS) LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the parking at the academy
- the travelling time

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- strong leadership that promotes learning
- very good programme development and progression opportunities
- exceptionally good partnerships
- good range of strategies to develop learners' understanding of equality of opportunity
- good support to remove barriers to learning
- well-developed quality improvement system for training and development

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity data
- insufficient evaluation of the quality improvement process

9. FG has strong leadership that promotes learning. Its vision statement promotes lifelong learning, and this is at the centre of all its business planning. Strategic and business planning is good and objectives are shared with, and understood by, all training staff and salon trainers and assessors. Individual areas of the business develop their own strategic and business plan detailing how they will contribute to the provider's objectives. The focus is on continual improvement through training and updating to constantly improve individuals' skills and the services on offer in all aspects of the business. Rewards are effectively linked to achieving qualifications. Staff receive wage increases when they achieve qualifications that improve their expertise in their job role. For learners, training, attitude and professionalism are measured by a star system which is recognised both through a pay increase and at an annual awards ceremony. Learners are introduced to this system at induction. Training staff and work-based trainers and assessors are committed to the system and work well together to encourage and motivate learners to achieve.

10. FG has very good programme development. Effective planning ensures that it provides learning opportunities that range from NVQs at level 1 in hairdressing to foundation degrees. Programme content is well-thought-out to ensure it meets the needs of its target group. Career routes are clearly defined. Good links with schools give pupils the opportunity to attend a well-structured work placement or a level 1 NVQ hairdressing programme. When learners complete an advanced apprenticeship programme, they progress to a graduate finishing school to further develop their skills, confidence and communication skills. There they can access specialist training and a foundation degree. FG funds a scholarship programme to enable learners to achieve advanced or degree-level qualifications leading to a career in hairdressing and management. Fifty per cent of school pupils have progressed from level 1 NVQs to the apprenticeship programme or a full-time hairdressing programme at a local college.

11. FG has developed exceptionally good partnerships with further education colleges in

Walsall, Wolverhampton and Derby. They collaborate extremely well to develop commercial salons within the colleges. FG, in partnership with a hairdressing supplier and the college, has fitted out and developed a graduate salon that operates independently as a hairdressing salon within the college building. Staff from FG share their expertise and time to develop all aspects of this facility so that it operates and functions as a commercial salon. Financial targets are agreed for the year. Learners in the salon are working stylists and are given targets to achieve on salon services and sales. FG's artistic team provides regular training on the latest fashion techniques for the college hairdressing staff. They act as consultants to ensure that all aspects of the graduate salon are constantly improving. In Walsall College, this has been so successful in achieving learner employability that the college now has a number of graduate academies in other vocational areas. FG has good partnership links with Stafford College and provides all the NVQ hairdressing training to its full-time students. Both parties benefit, drawing on expertise that would not normally be available to them. For example, staff from FG can access all the college's in-house staff development free of charge, and learners can use the computer and support facilities at the college. FG is well represented on local education working groups and on a number of sector skills council working groups. Derby University and FG have worked together to develop a foundation degree in hairdressing. This is in the third and final year of its pilot stage. Out of a group of five learners, three are completing their final year.

12. Communication within teams and throughout the organisation is good. There are regular meetings at each level of the business. Standard agenda items ensure that key business priorities are regularly reviewed and discussed, and that the outcomes of discussions are acted upon. Minutes of meetings are recorded clearly and are shared to ensure that all teams are well informed on all aspects of the business. Staff feel valued, part of the decision-making process and able to influence business decisions and improvements. All staff have an annual appraisal that identifies their training needs.

13. FG manages its resources well. The training facilities reflect the best industry standards. Learning resources are of excellent quality and effectively support learning. Staff are well qualified and have an excellent range of professional experience.

14. Data management is satisfactory. A recently installed management information system provides managers with regular reports on learner recruitment, progress, and success and progression rates. The reports are discussed at meetings and used to make management decisions. FG plans to develop the system to enable more detailed analysis and target-setting to be carried out. Strategic and business planning are linked both to FG's and the LSC's priorities. However, while development plans identify objectives and outcomes, they do not provide sufficient detail on how these will be achieved.

15. Health and safety are good. There are annual spot checks on all salons. General standards of appearance, hygiene and salon maintenance are reviewed as well as first aid, fire procedures, servicing of electrical appliances, control of hazardous substances and displays of appropriate policies. FG awards grades ranging from 'excellent' to 'some concerns'. It draws up an action plan with target actions and timescales, and this is rigorously monitored. All salons receive a copy of these reports.

16. FG has satisfactory arrangements for the provision of literacy, numeracy and language support. All learners complete a basic and key skill builder computer-based assessment at induction. They are set appropriate levels of key skills work and individual programmes.

Learners have access to a range of online and paper-based activities and tests, and their progress is monitored in detail. Trainers have teaching qualifications, key skills qualifications and a planned professional development programme for Skills for Life training including literacy and numeracy at level 3. Skills for Life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Learners at entry levels 2 or 3 attend Stafford College for further diagnostic assessment and a structured basic skills programme. This is provided by tutors with a level 4 literacy and numeracy qualification. Learners with dyslexia are well catered for, although FG's trainers do not hold specific qualifications in this area.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

17. FG has a good range of strategies to develop and promote learners' understanding of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity learning is well planned. Learners have an interactive induction with role-play, discussions and written exercises. This is reinforced through the employment, rights and responsibilities element of the qualification. Trainers use a very good range of review questions linking legislation to learners' personal experience. Learners' understanding is further reinforced through recall questionnaires with more probing questions at different levels of the qualification. Learners and staff have access to good supporting paperwork. A guidance and counselling booklet clearly outlines the grievance and appeals procedures. There are equality statements on disability, fairness, awareness and respect, and the policy itself is written in simple English. Cultural diversity is promoted through the NVQ unit on African-Caribbean Hair, marketing materials, and competitions, although it is less well understood by learners. Learners have access to specialist training and positive role models. The provider carries out school intervention visits in year 11 to challenge attitudes and gender stereotypes in the hairdressing industry. Trainers make effective use of courses in dyslexia, diversity and differentiation when devising lesson plans and schemes of work. Managers give presentations and encourage discussions and exercises at quarterly meetings for training staff and salon managers. FG has good links with outside organisations and local providers' networks to support guidance, training and sharing of practice.

18. FG provides good support to remove barriers to learning. Learners are treated with respect and care by academy and salon staff. Obstacles to learning are handled sensitively, and learners are encouraged and supported to achieve their potential. Learners' life skills, confidence and self-esteem are developed according to individual need. Learners' aspirations and interests are discussed and used when planning their programme. Young learners value highly the support they receive in the first 12 months of their programme. Each learner is allocated a mentor who has already completed the apprenticeship programme. Trainers provide sensitive support for male learners to overcome the barriers of peer pressure and role perception. Twelve per cent of the learners are men. Learners with allergies such as asthma and dermatitis are supported with special protective equipment. Fast-tracking is used as a strategy to get through persistent problem areas such as mixing chemicals and shampooing. One learner with sensitivity to colouring uses latex gloves and does not apply shampoo. Learners have the opportunity to attend catch-up sessions. Salons release learners for an extra day during the summer months. Catch-up sessions are available for everyone. Learners at any stage can elect to attend if they want to improve a particular area or fast track through the programme.

19. Learners have a clear understanding of the complaints procedure and are aware of

alternative steps to take if they are unable to communicate through their line manager. The equality of opportunity policy is updated annually. It does not reflect amendments to the legislation, although these are reflected in other documents. It is not clear which is the most up-to-date version of the policy. The provider has helped salon owners to understand and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It held a focus meeting in 2004 for all salon owners. Audits in 2005 led to an action plan of refurbishment for each salon. FG is monitoring compliance with the act through the spot-check system. The provider has a satisfactory range of adaptive technology. Salons have adjustable shelves and reception desks, and learners with dyslexia have access to learning materials on coloured paper and in appropriate font size. There are no hearing loop systems and paperwork is not available in languages other than English. Promotional materials carry a disability and equality of opportunity logo and include positive representations of under-represented groups.

20. FG carries out insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity data. Learner and staff recruitment are not monitored to check the representation of members of minority ethnic groups or people with disabilities. The provider does not sufficiently check for any differences in the performance of different groups, although it monitors the recruitment of male learners and has set participation targets in its three-year development plan. FG carries out spot checks in the workplace to see whether copies of equality of opportunity policies and guidance on harassment are displayed, but does not use these visits to reinforce employers' understanding. The effectiveness of learner support arrangements is not monitored. The three-year development plan includes targets to widen participation, but these do not take into account existing profiles or regional ethnicity data, and they are not discussed with employers. FG's arrangements for collecting data on equality of opportunity comply with the funding requirements. Data is collected on gender, ethnicity, and disability but not on the requirement for additional learning support.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

21. Quality improvement systems for training are well developed. Programmes are evaluated regularly at quality meetings, programme team meetings and through learner and employer evaluations. FG responds quickly to resolve identified issues. Quality standards are directly related to the learners' performance and their achievement of high professional standards. A star rating system reflects learners' professional behaviour, attitude and achievement within their apprenticeship training. Learners find this very motivational and value the financial incentives linked to their improvement in performance. At the end of each year FG gives a student of the year award to the learner with the highest star rating. A 'how to wow' booklet sets out the quality standards for FG's salons and training salons. Annual spot checks are used to grade salons on their performance. These processes effectively link training salon standards with those expected in the learners' salon work placements. A traffic light system provides regular reports on learners' progress and identifies learners who are falling behind with their learning targets by placing them in a red or amber category. Quarterly trainer and assessor meetings review learners' progress and discuss strategies to help them get back on track. These meetings are also used to evaluate and share best training practices. All salon trainers have to meet specific quality criteria to ensure learners receive a good standard of training in the workplace.

22. Several weaknesses identified at previous inspections have been resolved and are now areas of strength. For example, on- and off-the-job background knowledge training

and practical assessment are now co-ordinated effectively. Training staff and assessors meet regularly to discuss programme planning and training. Information on training school activities is shared with salon trainers and assessors to enable them to provide a coherent programme of learning for each learner.

23. Quality assurance processes are satisfactory and are updated annually. Some of the procedures relate to compliance with funding body contracts and others to human resources policies. These are mixed in with policies on work-based learning and cause some confusion when evaluating their effectiveness for self-assessment purposes. Some evaluation methods do not result in clear indicators that can be used effectively to measure performance.

24. Internal verification is satisfactory. Activities are planned and recorded thoroughly. Most salons have a worked-based assessor. Observations of assessment in the workplace take place annually, but the planning for these does not take into account the different support needs and the frequency of visits needed to support each assessor. An ongoing programme of training salon staff as work-based assessors is well conceived. Currently, 27 staff are working towards their trainer and assessor awards, and this will ensure that all salon workplaces have a least one and often two salon assessors, giving learners every opportunity to be assessed in the workplace.

25. FG's fourth self-assessment report was produced in April 2006. Managers and staff have appropriate involvement in the process. The views of learners and employers are used to reach the judgements in the report. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report on equal opportunities and quality improvement is insufficiently evaluative. The report is accompanied by a development plan that identifies appropriate areas for improvement but fails to include how key strengths will be consolidated and further developed.

26. There is insufficient evaluation of the outcomes of the quality assurance processes. Information is collected from learners' and employers' questionnaires, and on learners' recruitment, success rates and progression. It is analysed, and any issues identified are responded to effectively and quickly. Results are reported and discussed at regular quality improvement and team meetings. However, this information is not collated to provide headline data and judgements that could be used to set targets and measures for year-on-year improvements to the provision. Observation of teaching and learning is used effectively in the training academy with the three full-time trainers. However, other aspects of training, for example induction and review, are not included in the observation process. The salon-based trainers whose responsibility it is to provide weekly training and development for the learners in their salon are not observed.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hairdressing Apprenticeships for young people	99	1 1

27. FG has 99 learners on hairdressing training programmes. Twenty-six are apprentices and 73 are advanced apprentices. Apprenticeship programmes are planned to take 18 months. Most learners are placed in FG's hairdressing salons in Staffordshire, the West Midlands, Derbyshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. Off-the-job training is provided in the FG training academy in the centre of Stafford. Learners attend for two days each month for practical and background knowledge training in hairdressing. Practical training also takes place in the salons. Assessment takes place both in the training centre and in the workplace. FG's training manager is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of hairdressing training at the academies, supported by an assistant manager who is an internal verifier. Eighty-eight per cent of the learners are women.

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good and improving success rates
- very good development of learners' commercial hairdressing skills
- outstanding training
- good learner progression
- outstanding additional training opportunities
- particularly good learning environments
- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of initial assessment to plan individual learners' targets

Achievement and standards

28. Overall success rates for framework completion on the apprenticeship programme are good and improving. Changes in framework requirements were reflected in the overall success rates for 2004-05, but from 2004-05 to 2005-06, they rose from 51 per cent to 61 per cent. This is well above national averages. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices increased by 11 per cent to 62 per cent in 2005-06. Timely success rates are improving and most learners who achieve their NVQ also complete their framework. The learners currently on programme are making good progress and are on target to achieve their qualification. Some are expected to complete early. Over the past two years, FG has retained 80 per cent of its learners for the planned duration of their programmes.

29. Learners develop very good creative commercial hairdressing skills that are beyond those required for the NVQ level programme. Learners have a good appreciation of hairdressing in its widest sense including fashion and awareness of clients' lifestyle. They have the technical knowledge that is required to carry out difficult colour correction tasks, and demonstrate a strong individual creative style preparing hairdressing models for photographic sessions. Development of learners' interpersonal skills is good. Learners work to a high professional standard and frequently demonstrate their creative skills in competitions and hair shows organised by FG. Learners are enthusiastic about their work and have a positive attitude to their clients and to the hairdressing industry. They have good communication skills and are confident about advising their clients on the suitability of technical hairdressing services to the clients' hair and bone structure. Learners and employers value highly the commercial skills they acquire. Learners develop good health and safety practices and maintain a high standard of cleanliness. Portfolios are well organised and contain a variety of evidence including photographs of their work.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	23	83	43	83	32
		timely	23	73	27	78	20
	2004-05	overall	37	62	40	51	29
		timely	37	62	28	51	20
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	8	88	63	50	49
		timely	8	75	38	38	30
	2004-05	overall	51	51	48	51	41
		timely	51	49	32	49	28

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

30. Practical and background knowledge training is outstanding. Trainers encourage learners to experiment with different techniques to help develop their creativity. They use innovative techniques which challenge and test learners' ability to solve problems. For example, learners are presented with difficult colouring problems on a pre-coloured hairdressing practice block. They analyse the colour correction problem and apply their choice of colour, testing two alternative methods on the same head. Learners are encouraged to be critical of the results and use negative results as learning points. They present to the group what went well and what could be improved. Learners quickly gain confidence in dealing with the kind of colour correction problems often seen in the salon, and are able to competently suggest solutions to clients. Learners are actively encouraged to develop their practical hairdressing skills. Trainers are very competent and use their salon experience to illustrate key learning points. Learners have access to a range of hairdressing models of different age, gender and lifestyle, which enable them to develop a wide range of hairdressing skills. Trainers successfully match available models to the

development needs of their learners. Trainers quickly identify the needs of learners and frequently give learners individual support to develop their hairdressing skills. Learners can access additional training sessions at the academy if they find a particular skill difficult to master. Course materials used to support learning are of good quality and produced to a high standard. In background knowledge sessions, trainers use a variety of teaching methods to illustrate difficult hairdressing techniques and to stimulate and interest learners. Trainers enable learners to link background knowledge to their practical work. Training taking place at the workplace is well planned, systematic and complements and reinforces that taking place at FG's academies. Trainers in the salon are highly qualified, skilled and enthusiastic about helping learners develop their commercial skills to a high standard.

31. Learners have good progression rates. FG raises learners' aspiration to progress to higher-level qualifications. In 2004-05, 84 per cent of learners progressed from level 2 to level 3 NVQs. In 2005-06, 97 per cent progressed to level 3 courses. This is considerably higher than the national average of 10 per cent. FG has a clear career structure which is designed to provide learners with opportunities to progress within the company. There are good progression routes into management or the advanced technical aspects of hairdressing. Many of FG's senior managers and training staff started their hairdressing training with the organisation. Learners have the opportunity to progress to higher education and study for a foundation degree in hairdressing and salon management. Several of FG's former learners are in the latter stages of completing their degree. On completion of their NVQ training, many learners progress into employment as valued stylists. In 2005-06, 91 per cent of learners who completed their level 3 NVQ progressed into permanent positions in full-time employment. FG provides very good supporting literature, advice and guidance for all stages of learners' progression within the company. Initial advice and guidance is comprehensive, with learner-friendly promotional literature, structured interviews and informal support and guidance both from employers and FG staff.

32. FG provides an outstanding range of additional learning activities. Learners are excited and enthusiastic about the many opportunities to participate in a broad range of activities. This includes the FG hairdressing show, photo shoots, and external manufacturers' courses. Learners are encouraged and supported by FG to enter national hairdressing events to expand and develop their creativity. All learners attend a 12-week course at FG's finishing school to develop an understanding of customer service and client care and further develop their creative skills. They can attend a technical programme which focuses on hair colour or a programme designed for creative cutting. Both programmes have a strong focus on developing interpersonal skills, particularly in relation to customer care. Senior managers give presentations to learners attending the finishing school to help them understand how salons operate as a business. All learners have opportunities to take part in additional learning activities. Learners are enthusiastic and value the demonstrations they receive from FG's artistic team.

33. FG has particularly good learning environments. The two FG academies are situated in Stafford town centre and operate as commercial salons. FG also has access to four further salons that reflect a high commercial standard. Training rooms have a good range of high-quality images on display, appropriate to the subject area. One of the practical training salons has innovative computer monitors installed at the backwash which help learners communicate with their clients. Training salons have a very good range of retail products that enable learners to develop their retail sales skills. Learners have access to

the latest computer-based reception system, which gives them confidence with desk-based management systems. They receive on-the-job training in salons that operate to a high commercial standard. Salon-based trainers have access to a good range of learning materials that include a range of high-quality training videos produced by FG. Learners have the opportunity to work alongside stylists who are working to a very high standard.

34. Insufficient use is made of initial assessment when setting learners' individual targets. Targets do not take into account any prior learning identified at initial assessment, such as whether the learner has had a Saturday job in the hairdressing industry. Targets are too generic. During induction, learners undergo an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The assessment successfully identifies those who need help with their literacy and numeracy skills. Individual support is provided by FG staff. Learners can obtain additional support from Stafford College for specific literacy and numeracy needs. Learners receive individual support with their vocational assignments when they need it, but no testing is carried out to evaluate whether this has improved their overall literacy and numeracy skills. During induction, learners receive valuable information, advice and guidance, particularly in relation to the requirements of the NVQ and of the hairdressing industry.

Leadership and management

35. The management and planning of the links between on- and off-the-job training are particularly effective. Communication between employers, trainers and apprentices is good, and a variety of methods is used to ensure information is shared. These include e-mail, newsletters and planned structured meetings. Employers frequently communicate with FG informally by telephone about learners' progress. FG has clear expectations of the salons it works with in terms of what training they will provide, and employers understand the role they play in their learners' training. Clear schemes of work are in place that ensure learners' work in the academies is co-ordinated with the training taking place in the salon. A member of staff at FG has designated responsibility for reviewing learners' progress in the salon and ensuring that the salon staff know what training and assessment they must provide. The rate of assessment in the salon is monitored effectively by the assistant work-based learning manager, using a traffic light system. Where learners are identified as falling behind with their assessments, additional support mechanisms are put in place. Individual learners' progress at their salons is discussed with the salon staff by the academy manager.

36. Staff receive an annual appraisal which contributes to their development plan. FG provides excellent opportunities for staff to take part in a variety of good-quality training to further develop their professional skills. It encourages them to develop their creative skills, and there is a strong ethos of continuous staff development in hairdressing at all levels.

37. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is planned in advance and samples a range of evidence across all units. Assessors are observed once a year and given feedback and points for development. Standardisation meetings take place quarterly, and are used to share good practice and discuss consistency in assessment practice.

38. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. They are aware of FG's harassment and grievance procedure, and have a clear understanding of their employment rights and responsibilities. Employers have a good understanding of employment legislation in relation to their learners. Cultural diversity is less well

understood.

39. The self-assessment process is inclusive. All staff are asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and the draft self-assessment report is shared with all staff to ensure that it reflects the overall position. The final report broadly reflects the findings of the inspection team.

