

Fashion Retail Academy

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

20–23 September 2016

Overall effectiveness			Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Leaders, governors and managers have established a culture of excellence that results in very high achievement for learners.
- Leaders and managers use their outstanding partnerships with fashion retail employers to ensure that learners benefit from a rich and relevant curriculum.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are of the highest quality. Learners develop excellent industry-related skills and knowledge that prepare them very well for prestigious employment within the fashion retail industry.
- Learners' achievement is outstanding and progression into employment is exceptional.
- Working relationships between learners and staff at the Fashion Retail Academy are exemplary.
- Learners develop a very good understanding of the moral and social factors that have an impact on retail fashion and shoppers' buying trends.
- As a result of excellent ongoing careers advice and guidance, almost all learners gain employment at their first-choice employer or move into higher education.
- Highly effective safeguarding arrangements ensure that learners are very safe, including the firmly established emergency procedure in the event of a crisis. Learners understand very comprehensively how to work safely within the academy and in the workplace.
- Learners use the excellent learning facilities and resources to make very good progress in their studies.
- Leaders and managers have successfully actioned all areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Quality assurance measures are demanding and have a substantial impact, and governors, managers and staff monitor learners' achievement assiduously.
- Staff at every level of the organisation listen and respond quickly and effectively to learners' suggestions for improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Fashion Retail Academy (the academy) is a college with charitable status. Opened in 2005 as a joint venture between the government and the fashion retail industry, its mission is to develop and inspire talent for a specialist career in fashion retail. The academy is at the forefront of fashion retail education and is supported very effectively by employers. Programmes are designed by employers in collaboration with governors, senior managers and teachers to ensure that learners graduate with the skills and expertise they require.
- At the time of inspection, approximately 900 learners from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences were studying full-time courses from level 2 to level 4. The majority were aged 16 to 19. Approximately half of all learners live in London, with the remainder travelling considerable distances to study at the academy. While the academy is an inclusive college and accepts learners regardless of their prior educational experience, the majority of learners at level 2 and above have GCSE English and mathematics qualifications at A* to C. A very small proportion of learners work towards an apprenticeship qualification.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers benefit from further staff training and ongoing observation to improve their systematic checking of learners' understanding and progress in lessons, and to prepare learners more thoroughly for GCSE examinations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal and senior leadership team have successfully developed a culture of excellence where learners excel. Leaders and governors have very high expectations for staff performance and for learners to develop the highest-quality, industry relevant skills that meet the recruitment requirements of the fast-changing fashion retail sector.
- Outstanding partnerships with employers and the fashion retail industry ensure that learners benefit from a rich and varied curriculum and superb learning facilities. Learners study subjects that prepare them very well for a broad range of potential career paths including fashion retail buying, fashion retail merchandising and garment technology. Employers work closely with managers and staff to evaluate and enhance all aspects of learning. Senior fashion retail executives frequently host 'masterclasses' where they advise and inform learners on a range of subjects currently affecting the industry.
- Staff at every level of the organisation listen and respond quickly to learners' suggestions for improvement. Learners' views on every aspect of the learner experience are actively sought and closely monitored to ensure that the quality of learning remains high.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have taken effective action to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and have successfully tackled the recommendations made for improvement. For example, quality assurance measures are demanding and result in improvements, and the use of data by managers and staff at all levels to monitor learners' progress and achievement is very good. Performance management is much improved and ensures that standards at the academy remain high.
- Leaders are committed to ensuring that all learners achieve a high standard of skills in English and mathematics. Learners now make good progress towards developing the English and mathematics skills demanded by employers. The small proportion of learners who do not have a GCSE A* to C in English and/or mathematics are expected to achieve this as a part of their studies. Most staff are adept at providing frequent opportunities for learners to practise and hone their English and mathematics skills through lesson activities, assignment briefs and research activities.
- Governors and leaders have ensured that the academy remains financially sound. As a result, learners benefit from additional financial help through generous bursaries. Governors and leaders use their outstanding working relationships with partners and employers to continue to improve and enhance the learning facilities by securing generous donations to complement their own ongoing financial investment. For example, employers have recently funded a digital marketing suite to further enhance the learning experience on digital marketing for fashion courses.
- Quality assurance is good. Through ongoing self-assessment of performance, leaders, managers and staff recognise accurately the strengths and areas for improvement. They use this knowledge effectively to set challenging targets for staff and to help inform ongoing staff professional development.

The governance of the provider

- Governors are exceptionally well qualified and bring a wealth of current industry experience to their role. They monitor learner achievement data diligently and measure effectively the impact of senior managers' actions to maintain improvements in learning and ensure that learners' achievements are outstanding.
- Governors demand the highest standards for learners. They strive to ensure that learners receive the highest-quality learning experience, are expertly prepared for a career in fashion retail and achieve their first choice of employment on completing their studies. Governors work collaboratively together to ensure that the training and recruitment needs of the fashion retail industry are met excellently.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective, comprehensively designed and thoroughly adhered to, and ensure that learners are safe. Leaders and managers have evaluated risks properly and developed an ethos where all staff and learners know how to raise concerns.
- Learners are very safe while studying at the academy and are thoroughly trained in how to keep themselves safe when working in an industry that often requires lone working and anti-social working hours. Governors, leaders, managers and staff are comprehensively trained in all aspects of safeguarding learners and themselves. Training is frequent, thorough and evaluated for its impact on ensuring learners' safety.
- Leaders and managers work closely and well with the widest range of appropriate partners and agencies to continually review and appraise their safeguarding practices. Their response to implementing the 'Prevent' duty ensures that staff and learners understand thoroughly the risks posed to them from those who seek to promote extremist views and violence.
- Governors and leaders recognise that the high profile of their partners and the central London location of the academy results in enhanced potential risks to learners. Leaders, managers, staff at all levels and learners routinely practise the academy's well-designed and highly effective 'lock down' emergency procedure which has been planned in collaboration with the Metropolitan Police.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers use their subject expertise and industry experience extremely effectively to plan and teach classes that motivate, stimulate and engage learners. Assignments and lessons are highly relevant to the requirements and expectations of the industry. As a result, learners are expertly prepared for work.
- Managers and teachers set the highest standards for learners; high aspirations and a thirst for success permeate every aspect of life and lessons at the academy. Learners enjoy their lessons because of the challenging and inspiring teaching in all subjects.
- Learners develop very good levels of analytical and information and technology skills (IT). Learners have excellent access to a wide range of industry-specific digital platforms, for example the World Global Style Network (WGSN). Learners make good use of WGSN and

other IT, to interpret and use customer analysis and industry trend reports to support their project work and studies. Teachers encourage learners to prepare thoroughly in advance of lessons and frequently set additional research activities to develop further learners' grasp and understanding of their subject matter.

- Managers and staff work collaboratively and effectively to ensure that learners and apprentices develop a good awareness and understanding of the moral and ethical issues that challenge the fashion retail industry. For example, learners debate the environmental impact of dyeing clothes in the garment industry, using animal fur and other products in high-end fashion retail, and sustainable alternative leather products in future fashion garments.
- Learners make excellent progress over time and in lessons because most staff carefully plan and assiduously monitor every aspect of an individual learner's progress. Individual learning plans are used successfully to review and monitor learning. Learners are able to articulate their own and each other's progress and the content of their work exceptionally well. A very small minority of teachers do not always systematically check learners' understanding in lessons, leaving learners unclear as to what is expected of them next.
- Oral and written feedback to learners on their work is of a high standard, frequent, and is of specific help to individual learners. Learners know what they need to do to improve further and how best they can do this.
- Staff ensure that additional study help for learners is readily available and many learners make very good use of this to succeed in their studies. One-to-one tutorials are enhanced by small-group 'surgery style' workshops, for example in fashion design, where learners ask for subject-specific help on aspects of their work from their course tutor.
- Learners benefit from the highest standard of resources that support their learning both inside and outside of the classroom superbly. Frequent trips, visits and guest presentations enrich learners' understanding and develop effectively their knowledge of their chosen career path in industry.
- Managers and supervisors expect high levels of independence and quickly make apprentices responsible for their own customer portfolio. For example, in digital marketing, apprentices manage their own client portfolio, crafting and sending promotional and marketing emails on behalf of a global airline.
- Learners use and apply their English and mathematics skills successfully to their vocational learning. For example, learners use measurements and calculations accurately when creating a retail window display, having first made a small-scale version in paper, fabric and card. Most written work that learners present is of a high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Learners are highly disciplined and demonstrate a professional approach to their studies. This ensures that they quickly develop excellent industry-relevant skills and understanding. Attendance in most lessons is high, and teachers investigate any learner absence promptly and put plans in place to help those learners who may have difficulties.
- Working relationships within the academy are exemplary. Leaders, managers, staff and learners have the highest professional regard for each other and model very effectively

the behaviours and values demanded from employers and the fashion retail industry.

- Initial and ongoing careers advice and guidance are excellent. For example, at each of the academy open days managers and staff provide specialist taster workshops to raise learners' understanding of the wide range of potential careers open to them. Workshops in digital marketing, garment technology and merchandising give learners a very good insight into the fashion retail industry and help guide their subsequent course application and future career path. Ongoing individual advice and guidance from teachers and assessors ensures that learners and apprentices progress successfully into their chosen career.
- Learners benefit from high levels of pastoral care and staff develop well learners' and apprentices' understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The academy restaurant provides inexpensive, healthy food choices and most learners choose to eat there. Through the tutorial programme and in lessons, staff are careful to discuss a wide range of health-related and body image issues. Learners feel confident and able to self-disclose matters relating to their personal health and mental well-being.
- The standard of learners' work is exceptionally high and, as a result, most achieve their qualification successfully and secure either good jobs or places at university. An industry project, central to each programme, ensures that the standard of vocational skills that learners develop is extremely high. Learners' work is of a professional standard long before they complete their course.
- Learners are prepared expertly for employment within the fashion retail industry. All learners benefit from a carefully planned work placement or internship within a high street fashion retail business. Teachers match learners to an employer that meets their own career goals and aspirations, and will provide the opportunity for them to practise and develop further the skills they have learned while at the academy.
- Learners with high needs and children looked after receive excellent personal support that enables them to focus on their studies and achieve at the same high level as their peers. Teachers ensure that learners know and understand how to work effectively with clients and co-workers who have a hearing loss or are sight impaired.
- Learners develop a good understanding of world views and life in modern Britain. Teachers use tutorials and lessons effectively to explore topics such as freedom of speech and expression, democratic voting and the role of fashion retail in promoting internationally the employment rights of those people employed in the garment industry.
- Learners are very safe at the academy and beyond. Leaders, managers and staff place a strong and effective focus on learners' safety including safe working practices in the academy and at work, and through well-established emergency procedures designed to promote learners' safety in a crisis.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications has improved further since the previous inspection and is now very high. Learners at the academy achieve far better than most learners who study similar qualifications with other providers. At the time of inspection, early in the academic year, learners had settled quickly into learning, and were making very good progress with their studies.

- The achievement of learners on 16–19 study programmes, which make up the majority of the provision, is very high and for adult learners it is exceptional. The very small proportion of learners in receipt of high needs funding, and children looked after, achieve at the same high level.
- Learners develop excellent vocational skills in lessons and through completing assignments that are carefully matched to the exacting standards demanded by the fashion retail industry. For example, in a graphic skills for fashion lesson, learners used digital technology in a highly effective manner to further enhance black and white images with colour.
- The proportion of learners who progress successfully into a career in the fashion retail industry is very high. Learners secure well-paid employment in areas such as fashion buying, merchandising, retail management and as personal assistants to company chief executives in fashion and retail. Learners who do not go into employment move on to study in higher education.
- Most learners make excellent progress relative to their starting points. Many learners who have had low academic achievement at school make significant progress beyond their own expectations. Learners improve their confidence and self-esteem and are highly motivated to succeed in their studies and future careers.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification is high, although not enough complete within the planned timescale. Current apprentices are making good progress, remain in employment on completion of their qualification and secure promotion.
- Learners make very good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills and apply these very effectively to their vocational learning. Of the small proportion of learners who are required to re-take GCSE English and mathematics qualifications, the majority successfully achieve A* to C grades in English. In mathematics, while the proportion of learners achieving A* to C grades is improving, more work is required to develop further learners' confidence when taking exams.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Currently, 671 full-time learners, the majority of the academy total, are working towards qualifications at level 2, 3 and 4. Most learners aged 16–19 study on level 3 programmes in fashion retail or fashion design.
- Learners make very good progress in lessons and over time. At the start of their programme, learners complete challenging assignments to a very good standard within short timescales. For example, fashion retail learners produce a high-quality web-based personal profile using a specialist, industry-specific web-based platform.
- Learners develop outstanding skills for employment and high levels of personal effectiveness as a result of their studies and the excellent work experience and internships that they undertake. Leaders, managers and teachers ensure that learners are fully prepared for the challenges of fashion retail and the city workplace. Learners work with increasing levels of autonomy during their time at the academy and are fully

prepared to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners develop very good levels of skills in critical thinking and in critiquing their own and others' work. Their attendance and timekeeping are exemplary.

- Learners develop very high levels of practical and creative skills across a broad range of subjects such as pattern cutting, drawing and illustration. They use digital media, IT and various industry-standard software very well to enhance their work and assignments.
- Teachers are good role models for the fashion retail industry and use their experience extremely effectively to provide detailed verbal and written feedback to learners. As a result, learners make excellent progress and are able to correct and enhance their work very well. For example, fashion design learners quickly develop their drawing and sketching skills through completing six studies within a challenging time constraint before evaluating their own and each other's work through a well-considered peer review.
- Highly qualified teachers with excellent industry experience, skills and knowledge ensure that teaching and learning are stimulating, relevant and fun. Excellent assignments use images and text successfully to convey the standards expected, and this motivates learners to succeed at a high level. Teachers plan most learning effectively to develop learners' understanding of key concepts; for example, the hierarchies that exist within large organisations. However, in a small minority of lessons, teachers do not check thoroughly enough whether learners have understood or made good progress with a topic before moving on to the next stage of learning.
- Careers advice and guidance is excellent. Teachers use their extensive industry knowledge highly effectively to provide individual advice and guidance to learners. Learners have a clear and single focus on their own intended career destination and are prepared well to succeed in a competitive industry.
- Learners develop a keen awareness of how society and cultural influences impact on retail fashion. Teachers carefully select topics and images to challenge learners' preconceptions and support their developing ability to debate and discuss. For example, in one lesson the teacher presented recent catwalk images of models wearing face-obscuring masks together with newspaper coverage of the ban on wearing a burka in France. Learners and the teachers then explored their own views on the subject and discussed what challenges this presented for the fashion retail industry.

Adult learning programmes

Outstanding

- Currently, 195 full-time learners, around one quarter of the academy total, are working towards qualifications at level 2, 3 and 4. Most learners study at level 4 on programmes varying from fashion retail, marketing and business, to digital marketing for fashion and garment technology. Learners attend well, are eager to learn and enjoy their studies. They display a very positive attitude to learning and are supportive and caring of each other and the progress they are making.
- Learners' achievement is exceptional because leaders, managers and teachers have high expectations for them to succeed and develop the high-level skills required by the industry. Leaders have ensured that the academy, based in the centre of London's fashion retail sector, maintains excellent links with employers who shape the curriculum expertly to meet fashion retail training needs.

- Outstanding work placements and internships ensure that learners are exposed very effectively to the demands and requirements of industry. Learners complete a comprehensive evaluation of the skills they acquire and the benefits they gain from working in industry, for example the personal skills and professionalism required when attending meetings with fashion retail buyers. Learners and employers evaluate comprehensively the time spent in industry and this enables teachers to assess and gauge learners' progress well.
- Industry masterclass lectures enable learners to thoroughly grasp the necessary skills and attributes demanded by employers and also provide good opportunities for learners to network and talk to a wide range of high-profile fashion retail personalities. Masterclass lectures also develop learners' social skills and improve their self-confidence very successfully.
- Learners make very good progress in developing their English skills further. Learners maintain well-presented files and take detailed notes to support their studies and to use in their assignment work. Learners understand how to present their work and themselves in the most effective manner to secure employment in a highly competitive industry. Industry leaders comment positively on the high standard of learners' work and presentations.
- Teachers are skilled and adept at developing and enhancing learners' mathematical skills and knowledge. They place great emphasis on accurate calculations and on the cost of materials and services. For example, in one lesson learners calculated the cost of a wide range of materials to establish the most cost-effective option, and in another lesson learners calculated the space requirements for a display from a design sketch.
- Highly effective careers advice and guidance ensures that learners succeed in finding well-paid employment with prestigious employers. Accurate and detailed pre-course advice and guidance places learners on a programme that best meets their career aspirations. Learners make informed choices because detailed ongoing careers advice and guidance enables them to make ambitious but realistic plans for their next steps into employment or further study.
- Teachers use their expert industry and commercial experience very successfully to enliven lessons and make clear key learning points. Most teachers are current industry practitioners and all understand the high standards expected of learners once they enter the workplace. Learners recognise and appreciate teachers' industry knowledge and hold their teachers in very high regard.
- Learners develop a very good understanding of the moral and ethical challenges that face the fashion retail industry. For example, in one lesson teachers challenged learners to consider the stereotypical body images conveyed by the fashion media.

Provider details

Unique reference number	57839
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	815
Principal/CEO	Lee Lucas
Telephone number	020 7307 2341
Website	www.fashionretailacademy.ac.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)	-	-	55	1	426	28	190	166
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	3	1	-	-		
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	1							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and 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 manager for curriculum and quality, 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

Jules Steele, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tim Gardner	Her Majesty's Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector
Ray Walker	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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