

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by Hays Travel

A report by HM Inspectors

8 September 2026

Owner	Dame Irene Hays
Inspection date	29 June 2026
Provider type	Employer
Lead HMI	Peter B Connelly
Apprentice numbers	19

1. Background

External inspections of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) providers are planned collaboratively between the provider and HM Inspectors. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provides information regarding provider performance, including key data to support this process.

During the inspection, a team of HM Inspectors evaluated the quality of training provision and the experiences of apprentices and key stakeholders. The team met with staff, apprentices and other stakeholders and explored the quality of training delivery; how well the needs of apprentices are being met; and approaches to improve the quality of provision.

This report summarises the findings from the inspection, highlighting areas of positive practice and areas for development. The provider receives grades for three elements: leadership and management; quality of delivery, and progress and outcomes. The report also contains any main points for action identified by HM Inspectors.

The report will be shared with the provider, Scottish Government and SDS. A final summary report will be published on HMIE's website. For colleges, the report will also be shared with the Scottish Funding Council and the college Board of Management.

2. The provider and its context

Hays Travel is a national travel provider who have been delivering travel services apprenticeship programmes across the UK since 2021.

On-the-job training takes place in the store in which the apprentice is based. Off-the-job training is delivered by Hays Travel training staff. The programme combines qualification requirements with employer-led training aligned to the "New to Travel" programme. Apprentices in remote locations participate online.

3. Outcome of inspection

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Management	Excellent
Delivery of Training	Excellent
Progress and Outcomes	Very Good

4. Summary of inspection findings

A summary of the findings of HM Inspectors is set out below.

Element 1: Leadership and Management

QI 9.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The owner, board members, leadership team and staff at Hays Travel collaborate well to develop, promote and deliver the company's strategic vision and values. This includes developing and applying meta skills and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools, to help build relationships with customers and plan their travel needs.
- The apprenticeship programme is aligned well to the needs of the business. Senior managers take good account of emerging changes to the travel market and draw productively on this to ensure candidates have the knowledge and skills necessary to meet customer demand.
- Emerging growth in areas such as travel insurance, currency exchange or new cruise destinations is directly addressed by senior management to ensure training is focussed on the knowledge and skills necessary to meet customer demand.
- The owner and Board share a strong commitment to provide apprentices from all backgrounds with the skills required to become long-term, successful employees within the business. Many apprentices have taken opportunities to become leaders and managers. The current Chief Operating Officer started as an apprentice, and around a quarter of managers in Scottish travel stores graduated from the apprenticeship programme.
- Leaders are active in contributing to apprenticeship developments at regional and national levels. Senior staff contribute productively to a range of external partnerships and technical expert groups to promote business opportunities and identify new skills to be incorporated within qualifications. For example, a staff member presented at a recent SDS Meta Skills Community of Practice event.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation and change

Areas of positive progress

- Senior leaders regularly review and adapt training plans to meet the organisation's strategic and operational needs. As a result, apprentices undertake training with travel services suppliers, helping them customise travel itineraries for customers and achieve sales targets.
- Leaders respond effectively to local and national needs, and government priorities. They contributed effectively to ensuring the content of the new MA programme in Travel Services is relevant and aligned well to sector and employer needs.
- Each week, Learning and Development (L&D) assessors meet regional sales managers to discuss commercial priorities. They share the outcomes of these meetings effectively with apprentices, helping guide their customer interactions.
- Senior managers and store managers know candidates well. They draw effectively on this to plan work schedules and activities that enable candidates to collate evidence of their progress.
- Staff support apprentices well to recognise, develop and apply meta skills from the start of their programme. Apprentices use these skills effectively to assess customers' needs and preferences, and to plan and customise travel arrangements. Staff use progress reviews and pre-exit meetings well to help apprentices reflect on how effectively they have developed these skills.
- Leaders act quickly to address areas for improvement. They analysed the reasons for low apprentice retention and used the findings to develop a retention strategy. This led to the appointment of an Additional Learning Support (ALS) Coach and improved arrangements for recruitment, induction and learner support. The strategy provides early, targeted support and is improving apprentice retention.
- Leaders support L&D assessors well to engage in continuous professional development to ensure learning, teaching and assessment practices are current and in line with industry standards.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- Strategic Board meetings provide a constructive forum to review the apprenticeship programme's performance and inform decisions to improve its quality and content.
- Throughout the organisation there is a strong team approach to improving the quality of the programme. Regular discussions with senior staff and delivery staff, alongside feedback from apprentices and stores managers, constructively identify and resolve issues.
- Staff engage productively in discussions to enhance the content and delivery of programmes. Regular meetings are used well to share effective practice, ensure consistency and standardisation of programme delivery and to monitor the progress of apprentices.
- Training staff plan activities carefully so that apprentices and line managers have sufficient time to discuss progress without disrupting business during peak sales periods in January and February.
- All store managers share a commitment to ensuring the programme produces a highly skilled workforce. Staff meet regularly to discuss the effectiveness of programme content and delivery and draw on the findings to produce an annual evaluation and strategy plan that identifies new products and services to be included the following year.
- Quality improvement and assurance arrangements are highly effective. All L&D assessors meet awarding body quality assurance standards and verification requirements, ensuring assessment decisions are consistent and fair. This strengthens store managers' and apprentices' confidence in the quality of training provision.
- The selected units from the framework meet Hays Travel's business needs effectively and provide strong opportunities for candidates to complete their programme ahead of schedule.
- L&D assessors carry out progress reviews with apprentices and store managers. This supportive process helps assessors focus on apprenticeship progression, reflect on how effectively they develop apprentices' skills, and uphold the company's vision of improving customer service.

Areas for development

- None identified.

Element 2 Delivery of training

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- All apprentices engage well in induction activities. Numeracy, literacy and other diagnostic assessments are used well by staff to identify potential barriers to learning, address individual learning needs, and initiate support plans. These are shared with managers and assessors to ensure candidates receive appropriate support during their MA.
- The MA programme provides an effective blend of on-the-job learning and off-the-job training that incorporates, face-to-face and hybrid learning approaches. Apprentices in remote locations benefit from real-time, online training sessions to engage in group learning, participate in class discussions and access collaborative training activities.
- Training staff take good account of apprentices' needs when planning in-house training events. This includes providing a breakfast club to ensure candidates have eaten and are able to participate fully in the programmes.
- At the start of the programme L&D assessors introduce apprentices to meta skills and the concept of Hays Travel *SMILE* values (Supportive, Motivational, Innovative, Loyal and Excellent). These skills and values are embedded fully within the MA programme and L&D assessors support apprentices well to reflect on how they have developed and applied these skills during progress reviews.
- Off-the-job training is of high quality and incorporates effective support and coaching techniques. Training sessions are planned well and delivered using appropriate, industry-relevant resources. This encourages apprentices to engage fully in their training and widens their knowledge and understanding of the travel industry.
- L&D assessors have appropriate levels of qualifications and significant professional experience of working in the travel sector. They are well respected by apprentices and store managers. Apprentices benefit from assessors' first-hand knowledge to gain insight into the travel industry and access guidance on how to develop their personal, social and employability skills.
- L&D assessors use well-considered questioning techniques effectively to ensure apprentices reflect fully on their learning and work experiences. They make good use of positive reinforcement to encourage and support apprentices to engage in learning to expand their knowledge and skills.
- All apprentices engage productively in supplier events to gain understanding of new travel products and services. This includes, for example, undertaking training aboard a cruise liner to learn first-hand about the cruise experience.
- L&D assessors encourage apprentices to take full responsibility for their learning and to

progress at a pace appropriate to their capabilities. They tailor approaches well to take account of the individual circumstances of apprentices and as a result all apprentices engage positively and productively in their training activities.

- Staff have a strong focus on equipping apprentices with the relevant skills and competencies to contribute effectively to the day-to-day work in their home store and to achieve their sales targets. Apprentices make good use of examples drawn from their work roles to provide evidence of progression in skills and competencies.
- During the first six months of the programme, apprentices value having experienced staff review their social media communications for accuracy. This helps them build the skills and confidence to use social media effectively in their role.
- Effective collaboration between assessors, store managers and apprentices ensures that the content and delivery of the training programme is planned and managed very well.
- All apprentices value the regular contact and feedback they receive from L&D assessors to reflect on their performance, measure how well they are progressing, and plan activities to achieve their apprenticeship and personal goals.

Areas for development

- Store managers would benefit from training on the use of the e-portfolio to access real time information about the progress of apprentices.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- L&D assessors deliver a comprehensive induction programme that helps candidates to become familiar with the company's ethos and vision, understand work roles and responsibilities, and learn about the importance of meta skills.
- During induction, training staff deliver group tasks that widen understanding of the role of a travel consultant. This includes *Build the Perfect Employee* and *School versus Workplace*, which are highly effective in helping candidates to recognise important aspects of the workplace.
- Store managers provide high-quality training and support to apprentices. They apply their professional knowledge and skills well to help apprentices become competent and independent in their work role and to achieve their sales targets.
- L&D assessors use their skills and personal attributes well to convey and promote industry standards and expectations. Training sessions and progress visits are structured well to ensure candidates understand concepts and systems. Trainers engage candidates regularly in discussions to check their knowledge and understanding and measure skills development.

- Assessors ensure assessments are planned effectively and utilise industry-standard resources well to ensure apprentices develop relevant vocational knowledge and technical skills. Almost all apprentices report that this helps them to gain confidence in applying their skills in the workplace.
- Assessors are skilled in timing and adapting training and assessment approaches to meet individual apprentice needs. This enables almost all candidates to progress quickly and allows additional support to be made available to candidates who are experiencing challenges in their learning.
- All apprentices receive regular visits from assessors in the workplace and draw productively on this to set and complete milestones and SMART targets in advance of their progress review.
- All apprentices make good use of the e-portfolio system to monitor and track progression in competencies and skills and upload evidence from their day-to-day work in preparation for their progression reviews. The e-portfolio is highly engaging, promotes achievement, and is helping trainers and apprentices to monitor and track progression effectively.
- There is strong collaboration between training staff and store managers, and all candidates appreciate the collective support and expertise they gain from staff.

Areas for development

- None identified

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- All apprentices receive a well-structured and well-organised induction programme that introduces them to all aspects of their work role. This prepares apprentices well for meeting the standards and expectations of their programme.
- The bi-annual observation process for L&D assessors is comprehensive and used well. Actions from meetings highlight areas of training delivery that work well and any areas that require development.
- Weekly meetings between regional managers and training staff are used well to monitor and discuss the performance and progress of individual apprentices. Regional managers draw on these discussions to contact apprentices to help them overcome any issues and to provide positive feedback on their achievements.
- In the first year of the programme, the COVID pandemic impacted significantly on retention and achievement rates of apprentices. Since then, managers and L&D assessors have carried out an annual analysis of apprentice withdrawal and successful completion rates and have put in place effective strategies that are supporting the improvement of apprentices' retention and

achievement rates.

- Training staff use company key performance indicators, apprentice outcome data and stakeholder feedback effectively to review programme performance and inform improvements. Feedback and insights from SDS and Qualifications Scotland External Verification reports, are also used well to support improvements in delivery.
- Questionnaires are used regularly by staff to gather feedback from apprentices on the quality of their training experience. Apprentices can recognise that their feedback is used well and can identify where improvements have been made?

Areas for development

- None identified.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes

QI 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- The overall rate of apprenticeship achievement in 2023-24 was 75%, which is in line with the national average.
- The 16-19 MA age group apprenticeship achievement rate in 2023-24 of 78.3% was 7% above the national average.
- Analysis of achievement and retention data submitted to SDS for 2025-2026 demonstrates a significant improvement of around 15% in apprenticeship retention and achievement.
- Recruitment of care-experienced apprentices has increased in the last two years and is now above the national average.
- Recruitment of apprentices with a disability in 2024-25 is above the national average.
- On completing their programme, all apprentices move into employment with the company. Within one to two years, a few progress to Assistant Manager roles.

Areas for development

- The overall rate of apprentice achievement for the 16-19 MA age group in 2024-2025 is significantly below the national average.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- All candidates make good progress in developing meta skills. They speak confidently about these skills and can demonstrate how they develop and apply them within a work context.
- All store managers are impressed with their apprentices' development and report significant improvement in their work-related performance both during and after completion of the programme.
- All apprentices benefit from enrichment activities that enhance the learning experience. They include field visits to Glasgow Airport and cruise ships, and attendance at supplier-led events. These activities broaden apprentices' knowledge and understanding of the travel industry and increases their engagement and confidence which helps them accelerate their development and progress.
- All apprentices and managers' report that achievement of personal goals increases the confidence of apprentices to apply for further roles in their workplace. After successful completion, many apprentices progress to the mentoring programme to support new recruits, and to *Rising Star* and *Aspiring Manager* programmes to prepare for potential promotion opportunities.
- All apprentices take part in the *Prepare for Peaks* training programme which prepares them well to cope with intensive sales drives in January and February.

Areas for development

- None identified

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are identified:

- Managers and staff should continue to improve rates of apprentice retention and achievements for the 16–19-year-old cohort.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

- Meta skills are embedded fully across the apprenticeship programme within workplace and reflection activities. These activities develop apprentices' ability to self-manage, apply social intelligence, and take opportunities to be innovative, alongside developing vocational knowledge and competences.
- Investment in recruitment and induction procedures is ensuring barriers to learning, and additional support needs are identified early and responded to quickly. This is supporting

candidates well to progress through their training.

7. What happens next?

HM Inspectors are confident that the provider has the capacity to continue to improve and HM Inspectors will make no further visits to the provider as a result of this inspection.

Peter B Connelly
HM Inspector

Appendix 1 Grades used in reporting

A common grading scale is used in making judgements for provider reviews:

- Grade 1 EXCELLENT – Outstanding and sector leading
- Grade 2 VERY GOOD – Major strengths
- Grade 3 GOOD – Important strengths with some areas for improvement
- Grade 4 SATISFACTORY – Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- Grade 5 WEAK – Important weaknesses
- Grade 6 UNSATISFACTORY – Major weaknesses

Summary

- An evaluation of **excellent** applies to training which is of a very high quality. An evaluation of *excellent* represents an outstanding standard of training which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the current provision. It implies that very high-levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
- An evaluation of **very good** applies to training characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish apprentices' experiences. While an evaluation of *very good* represents a high standard of training, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to provide training without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the provider will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.
- An evaluation of **good** applies to training characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of *good* represents a standard of training in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of apprentices' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the provider should seek to improve further the areas of important strength but take action to address the areas for improvement.
- An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to training characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of *satisfactory* indicates that apprentices' have access to a basic level of training. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of apprentices' experiences. It implies that the provider should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.
- An evaluation of **weak** applies to training which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of *weak* may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish apprentices' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the provider.

- An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in training, requiring immediate remedial action. The training experience for apprentices is at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for training evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the immediate support given by the provider.

Appendix 2 Evaluative Terms

The following standard HMIE terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.