

# Thomas Cook Group UK Limited

## Employer

<b>Inspection dates</b>		<b>23 – 27 March 2015</b>
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Outstanding-1</b>
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

## Summary of key findings for learners

### This provider is outstanding because:

- apprentices' achievements are outstanding; they make excellent progress and gain high grades
- apprentices' progression from intermediate to advanced level and into management roles is exceptional; the apprenticeship links strongly to career routes within Thomas Cook
- most apprentices take on impressive extra responsibilities at work giving them interesting projects and roles; they acquire excellent independent thinking and problem solving skills
- apprentices develop outstanding English and mathematics skills which they use to speak professionally with customers, make accurate calculations and prepare high quality work
- assessors and mentors provide excellent training and coaching for apprentices helping them to develop extensive retail travel skills; apprentices become confident travel consultants very rapidly and often exceed the sales and customer service targets set by their managers
- apprentices gain substantial knowledge of products and geography from high quality off-the-job training, e-learning modules and workbooks; they enjoy learning and are extremely enthusiastic
- assessors provide excellent guidance to apprentices about how they can improve their work, skills and knowledge and assess their work thoroughly and frequently
- assessors, mentors and managers provide apprentices with exemplary and coherent support which enables them to thrive and motivates them to succeed
- communication between all those involved in the programme is excellent; it leads to the swift identification of any apprentices who are falling behind and the provision of extra help or study time
- programme managers demonstrate a relentless drive for improvement that results in an exemplary and well-organised training and assessment programme; their ambitious decision to recruit and train a team of in-house assessors, at a time of economic turmoil, has led to a highly flexible programme that meets the organisation's and apprentices' needs completely
- the company's strong vision for equality and fairness permeates the whole programme; managers, assessors, mentors and apprentices exhibit these values fully, towards each other and with customers.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- No significant areas for improvement were identified.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Outstanding
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- Apprentices' achievement of their qualifications is outstanding and has been consistently very high for the last two years. They make exceptional progress while on their programme and most achieve their apprenticeship on time, or earlier. Virtually all groups achieve at an outstanding level, apart from a very small minority of male advanced apprentices who have good achievement.
- Apprentices achieve particularly well in external tests, such as in English, mathematics and technical certificates. They gain an exceptional and extensive knowledge of worldwide geography and the vast majority achieve high grades.
- Apprentices are exceptionally well motivated and enthusiastic about all aspects of their programme. They become highly competent retail travel consultants very quickly and work with minimal supervision. Managers set apprentices challenging sales and customer service targets, which the vast majority meet, consistently, or exceed.
- Apprentices gain excellent travel skills and product knowledge which they apply well at work. In particular, intermediate apprentices use their recently acquired knowledge to sell a wide range of holidays confidently. They sell exceptionally complex bookings very swiftly, such as those involving multi-centres, cruises, weddings, sporting events and for groups.
- Apprentices acquire excellent problem solving and independent thinking skills. Many take on impressive extra responsibilities at work while completing their programme. For example, advanced apprentices become area coordinators for cruise holidays and intermediate apprentices manage social media or window promotions for their store.
- Apprentices use mathematical skills very accurately at work. They calculate discounts, service charges, time differences and check-in times correctly and explain these to customers confidently. Advanced apprentices become highly proficient in selling and buying foreign currencies.
- Apprentices have excellent English skills and speak to customers very professionally. They question customers expertly, listen carefully to their needs and research different options diligently to ensure they offer suitable holidays. The quality of apprentices' written work, such as when preparing itineraries, is of a very high standard and well presented.
- Progression rates by intermediate apprentices, onto the advanced level, are excellent because all those who complete progress automatically. The apprenticeship programme is a key feature of career progression in Thomas Cook. A significant proportion of assistant and branch managers have been apprentices in the past. Apprentices are highly motivated by seeing their colleagues gain promotion, often at a young age.
- Programme, regional and store managers promote apprentices' success extensively. They take immense pride in apprentices' achievements and recognise this through the company's 'from the heart' awards, for example, when an apprentice sold a complicated wedding holiday package. Several apprentices achieve high profile external awards which are well publicised within newsletters and on their own website.

**The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding which reflects apprentices' excellent progress and achievement. The high quality training equips apprentices with exceptional skills and knowledge making them highly employable and increasing their progression opportunities within Thomas Cook.
- Store managers, mentors and assessors have exceptionally high expectations. They use their extensive experience from the travel industry to inspire apprentices and set challenging learning activities and targets. Learning opportunities take place frequently, with the vast majority of apprentices having at least an hour each day dedicated study time.
- Apprentices receive outstanding on-the-job training and coaching. Mentors plan the on-the-job learning expertly so that apprentices progress quickly from booking straightforward package holidays to tailor-made and multi-centre holidays. This helps apprentices gain in confidence and achieve sales targets, take repeat bookings and also receive letters of commendation from customers.
- Well-qualified assessors provide apprentices with high quality off-the-job training. They introduce a wide range of extremely interactive and fun learning activities that motivate apprentices to excel. Often, apprentices identify the training topic, making this learning exceptionally individual and relevant to their development needs. For example, an advanced apprentice wanted to learn how to improve her 'special interest' holiday assignment so the assessor devised an excellent activity around this topic.
- Apprentices complete a vast range of interesting and outstanding quality e-learning modules and workbooks. These include games, quizzes, uploading photographs, internet research and whole store activities. They increase their knowledge substantially in subjects such as geography, different travel companies and types of holidays. They also gain a greater understanding of Thomas Cook's operational standards such as those for health and safety, handling money securely and meeting the diverse cultural needs of customers.
- Assessors provide highly effective English and mathematics coaching because they make learning and activities very relevant to everyday life. The successful balance of individual and group tuition, alongside well-devised workbooks and e-learning modules helps apprentices to develop outstanding English and mathematics skills. Most, but not all, assessors correct apprentices' written work identifying where they can improve spelling and grammar.
- Assessors carry out comprehensive assessments of apprentices' work. They use a very broad range of methods to assess apprentices' skills and knowledge and to help them reflect on their practice. Typically, assessors observe apprentices making travel bookings, then question them incisively about the processes they followed, the knowledge they used and the alternatives they could have offered. Apprentices receive excellent feedback which they use effectively to improve their work.
- Assessors, store managers and programme managers arrange exciting opportunities to supplement apprentices' knowledge of products with which they are not familiar. For example, apprentices enjoy visiting a dry ski slope, or a cruise ship, which also helps them understand and sell difficult concepts such as ski equipment and lessons and different grades of cruise cabins.
- Apprentices attend a thorough, well-planned induction which takes them through their first three months at work. They complete stimulating activities, such as 'mystery shopper' visits to competitor companies and use the internet to research airport lounges, car hire and theme park tickets. This prepares them fully for their job role and to give high quality customer service.
- Apprentices complete detailed initial assessments that accurately identify their English and mathematics levels and aptitude for the travel industry. Assessors use the results of initial assessment to plan each apprentice's programme meticulously. As a result, apprentices have

highly individualised programmes that are specific to their needs, learning requirements and job role.

- Apprentices thrive as a result of the exemplary and coherent advice, guidance and support throughout their programme. Mentors receive extensive training for their role, and about the apprenticeship requirements, to help them give very accurate, timely and relevant information. Managers and mentors draw on their extensive industry knowledge to advise apprentices about careers in travel.
- Apprentices learn extensively about equality and diversity throughout their programme because these topics are incorporated into most e-learning modules, workbooks and training sessions. They develop a deep understanding of the diverse needs of customers, which they use to tailor packages and holidays. Apprentices gain an expert knowledge of the actions to take when booking holidays for customers with diverse needs such as physical disabilities, hearing impairments or special diets.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding because programme managers set exacting standards which have resulted in sustained, excellent achievement rates and a high quality apprenticeship programme. Their relentless focus on improvement has built on the strengths from the last inspection, rectified areas for improvement and led to outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.
- Programme managers have high aspirations and a very clear strategic vision for the apprenticeship. As a result, they took the bold strategic decision to move all training and assessment in-house, during a time of economic uncertainty, to ensure training would be of the highest quality and to better meet the company's expectations. Over the last four years, programme managers increased significantly the number of apprentices and assessors to meet the company's strategy for growing talent from within its own staff.
- Curriculum management and planning are outstanding and the apprenticeship meets Thomas Cook's needs completely. Apprentices contribute fully to the targets in their store. Regional managers recognise the value that apprentices add to their stores and involve those who excel in exciting projects that improve profitability. For example, one apprentice visited resorts in Turkey to research holidays so they could assist the regional manager to develop promotional and training activities for the region and ultimately increase sales.
- Communication between programme and store managers, assessors, mentors and apprentices is excellent. This results in all involved in the programme having an admirable knowledge of their particular apprentices' progress. Where apprentices are identified as being at risk of falling behind, programme, regional and store managers instigate an exceptionally effective support package. For example, organising staff from a neighbouring store to cover an apprentice's job for a day so they could catch up on coursework.
- Programme managers analyse data thoroughly each month to identify any early trends or groups that might be achieving less well. Their incisive assessment of each apprentice's risk of achieving their qualification on time has been instrumental in raising timely success rates, which are outstanding. Senior leaders receive very comprehensive management information and reports which keep them fully up-to-date about the programme and its successes.
- Programme managers use highly effective performance management systems. They set clearly-defined and challenging targets for assessors, which are reviewed frequently using a wide range of accurate performance data.
- Programme managers observe all aspects of assessors' work frequently and identify astutely and accurately their strengths and areas for improvement. They hold particularly effective assessor meetings, where they share best practice, ensure consistency in assessment and identify where

assessors need more help. Assessors have excellent and highly relevant staff development which helps them to deliver outstanding training and assessment.

- Programme managers' self-assessment of the quality of the provision is highly analytical, insightful and accurate. They review an extensive range of management information, performance management and quality improvement records to identify where further improvements can be made. The comprehensive quality improvement plan exemplifies how programme managers constantly strive for excellence from all apprentices and assessors.
- Apprentices' views contribute significantly to changes and improvements to the programme. Generally, apprentices have exceptionally high satisfaction levels with all aspects of their apprenticeship. When apprentices raised concerns about low salaries, programme managers took positive action resulting in a pay increase.
- Programme managers' and assessors' promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. They incorporate the company's code of conduct, values and behaviours seamlessly through all aspects of the apprenticeship. Programme managers monitor the recruitment and progress made by different groups of apprentices very carefully. Their inclusion of photographs of male apprentices in recruitment materials has helped increase new applicants from this traditionally under-represented group successfully.
- Safeguarding of all apprentices is good. The company has very detailed policies, procedures and training to ensure all staff know what to do should a safeguarding incident arise. Thomas Cook has highly effective arrangements with specialist external support for the rare occasions when major incidents, such as armed robberies, occur. Store managers have comprehensive risk assessments and action plans covering working arrangements for young people, including when they attend residential training or educational visits.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Thomas Cook Group UK Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	1						1		
Outcomes for learners	1						1		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	1						1		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1						1		

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Travel and Tourism</b>	<b>1</b>

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Employer							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	336							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mrs Rachael Gillett							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	June 2009							
<b>Website address</b>	www.thomascook.com							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	93	43	29	86	0	0		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>	N/A							
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A.</li> </ul>							

## Contextual information

Thomas Cook Group UK Limited (Thomas Cook) is one of the world's largest leisure travel groups, employing around 22,000 employees. Thomas Cook offers the travel services apprenticeship to learners who work in one of its 840 Thomas Cook or Co-operative stores. Since the last inspection, Thomas Cook has brought the assessment, off-the-job training, progress reviews, internal quality assurance and certification in-house and no longer subcontracts this. The programme is managed by the contracts and funding manager. The contracts and funding manager is supported by the assessor manager, who is responsible for a team of 11 assessors.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Janet Rodgers HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Contracts and Funding Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in travel and tourism.



## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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