HAYS PLC

INVESTOR CALL SCRIPT – Q4: 10 July 2026

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Kean. Good morning, everyone, and thanks for joining us today.

I will present the key points and regional details of today's trading update, before taking questions. As usual, all net fee growth percentages are on a like-for-like basis versus prior year unless stated otherwise and consequently exclude our previously communicated exits from operations in four countries and our divestment of the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, and Sweden.

OVERVIEW

Group net fees decreased by 5%, with Temp & Contracting down 3% and Perm down 7%.

I'm pleased to confirm that our decisive action has improved our financial performance and we currently expect FY26 pre-exceptional operating profit will be at the top of the consensus range following a return to strong YoY profit growth in the second half.

I would highlight the following key items from the results:

1. Temp & Contracting net fees decreased by 3% as volumes remained stable and the YoY decline in average hours worked in Germany was in line with our expectations and stable during the quarter. Group Temp & Contracting volumes decreased by 5% YoY including Germany down 6%, UK&I down 8%, ANZ down 8%, and RoW up 4%.

2. Perm net fees decreased by 7%, driven by a 10% decline in volumes and we saw modestly lower Perm activity and placement conversion through the quarter in markets outside North America, Southern Europe and Asia. This was partially offset by a 3% increase in the Group average Perm fee supported by our actions to target higher salary roles.

3. We continue to carefully allocate consultants to business lines with the most attractive productivity and long-term structural growth opportunity, target higher paid roles for candidates, and invest in the best tools for our consultants. Despite challenging markets, our actions delivered an acceleration in YoY average consultant net fee productivity growth to 8% in Q4 including notable increases in Germany and ROW. On a seasonally adjusted basis, productivity has increased now for a sector leading eleven consecutive quarters. Excluding the impact of country disposals and exits, group consultant headcount decreased by 4% sequentially in the quarter and by 12% year-on-year.

4. We have continued to make strong progress towards our structural cost savings programme with a further c.£20m per annum savings delivered in Q4. Altogether we have achieved c.£50m per annum savings in FY26, exceeding our target of c.£45m pa by FY29 three years ahead of schedule and in total have now delivered c.£115m per annum of structural savings since the start of FY24.

5. Our non-consultant headcount exited the quarter down 13% YoY. As a result of the acceleration of our cost programme in FY26, we expect to incur a c.£40m exceptional restructuring charge which will drive c.£40m per annum in cost savings. In addition, we have undertaken a significant review of our global property estate, outside of the countries we have exited or plan to exit. This will lead to the consolidation or downsize of

c80 properties globally, which will drive a c£10m per annum saving and will result in an impairment of our right-of use property asset of c.£30m.

6. During the quarter, we took action to reshape our country portfolio as we focus on building scale in high performing and high potential markets where we have an ability to establish and grow leading positions. As a result, we also incurred a modest non-cash loss on the disposal of our operations in six European countries.
7. The Group's net cash position was c.£20m which is in line with our expectations and reflects normal seasonal cashflows.

I will now comment on the performance by each division in more detail.

Our largest market of **GERMANY** saw fees down 7% YoY.

Temp & Contracting net fees decreased by 7% with volumes down 6% and a further 1% impact from negative hours and mix.

Temp & Contracting volumes remained stable overall and average hours worked in Germany remained stable through the quarter and in line with our expectations.

Perm was challenging but broadly stable sequentially through the quarter and the YoY decline in net fees was steady at 12%.

In our two largest specialisms, Technology was again flat year on year while the net fee decline in Engineering, our second largest, eased to 20% driven by greater stability in the Automotive sector. Accounting & Finance was down 15%. Construction & Property performed strongly once again with 38% net fee growth, driven by our focus on infrastructure and the energy sector, and this specialism now contributes 10% of our net fees in Germany versus only 4% in FY24.

Consultant headcount decreased by 6% in the quarter and by 16% year-on-year. Consultant net fee productivity increased by 9% YoY in Q4, driven by our ongoing focus on resource allocation, and we made strong progress with our structural cost savings initiatives.

In **UK & IRELAND,** fees decreased by 8%. Temp & Contracting declined by 5% but Perm remained subdued, down 12%, and activity softened slightly through the quarter.

Fees in the private sector declined by 9% YoY with the Public sector down 6%.

At the specialism level, Technology, was stable versus prior year, while Accountancy & Finance and Construction & Property decreased by 9% and 2% respectively. Office Support was up 1% as our actions to target higher salary roles continue to offset lower volumes in junior roles.

Consultant headcount decreased by 4% in the quarter and 16% year-on-year.

Consultant net fee productivity increased by 8% YoY and we made further good progress in improving operational efficiency and cost structures during the quarter as we continue to optimise our office portfolio and delayer management. Once again, a key driver of productivity has been greater focus from our consultants on high skilled roles and, as a result, YoY growth in average candidate salary remained at 7% for Perm in Q4.

In **ANZ,** fees decreased by 2% YoY with Temp & Contracting stable, down 2%, but Perm became slightly more challenging through the quarter and was down 1%.

The Private sector grew by 5% but the Public sector was again tougher and down 14%.

At the specialism level, Construction & Property (our largest at 20% of ANZ net fees) increased by 2% with Accountancy & Finance and Office Support up by 6% and 3% respectively. Technology declined by 9%.

Australia net fees were down 2% YoY with New Zealand at minus 13%

ANZ consultant headcount was down 6% through the quarter and by 8% year-on-year. Driven by our focus on resource allocation, consultant net fee productivity grew by 6% YoY. As with the UK & Ireland, a key driver of our profit recovery has been greater focus from our consultants on high skilled roles. As a result, YoY growth in the average salary of our Perm placements was maintained at 4% in Q4.

In our **REST OF WORLD** division, now comprising 18 countries, LFL fees decreased by 1%. Temp remained in positive YoY growth for the second consecutive quarter with fees up 5% but Perm declined by 5%. As a reminder, our total actual growth rate includes the impact from our previously communicated exits from operations in Chile, Colombia, Thailand, and Mexico and the recent disposal of our operations in six European countries.

In **EMEA ex-Germany**, net fees decreased by 2%. France, our largest RoW country, remained challenging with net fees down 17% but our actions to address productivity and costs are being delivered on plan and our profit performance improved in Q4. Portugal performed strongly and Spain again achieved record quarterly net fees, up 31% and 23% respectively. Poland grew by 6%.

In **Americas**, net fees decreased by 2%. Momentum improved through the quarter in the US, down 1%, and Canada was down 8%. We have previously highlighted a “substantial” bid pipeline with large Enterprise clients in North America and we expect recent wins to mobilise over the coming quarters.

Asia net fees increased once again by 8%. Japan grew by 9% driven by strong growth in our Temp & Contracting business whilst Greater China grew by 22% with improved activity in Perm

For RoW as a whole, consultant headcount decreased by 2% in the quarter and by 8% year-on-year.

I'd now like to take a few moments to update you on our strong **strategic progress** during the quarter. As we have previously shared with you, our initiatives to improve consultant net fee productivity in real terms and structurally improve our cost-base will be key drivers of profit recovery so we were encouraged by our return to strong YoY profit growth in the second half.

Amidst challenging markets, we are executing well and continue to make significant operational progress. We continue to invest in high potential and high performing business lines and scale back or exit those with low performance and potential. As previously communicated, we have exited four countries and sold our operations in six European countries over the last year and, consistent with our strategy, we recently announced that we were exploring options relating to our businesses in Belgium, Brazil, Greater China, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Singapore, and UAE.

Consultant fee productivity growth accelerated to 8% in the quarter and has increased now for a sector leading eleven consecutive quarters driven by careful allocation of consultants to business lines with the most attractive productivity and long-term structural growth opportunity, greater focus from our consultants on high skilled roles, and our investments to provide them with the best tools.

We are mobilising new contract wins with several large Enterprise clients which we expect to contribute to net fees over the coming quarters.

And our programmes to structurally reduce our cost base are performing well with the £45m structural cost saving target we set last year exceeded three years ahead of schedule.

Before moving to current trading, I would like to share some background behind our recent country portfolio decisions.

In the past, we have operated in many countries and specialisms. That has spread us too thinly. Over the last year we have made deliberate choices around where we compete, the specialisms we prioritise, the products we offer, and where we have the greatest opportunity to grow and establish leading positions. Businesses that are number one or two in clearly defined markets, by country and by specialism, consistently deliver stronger growth, higher margins and more resilient performances.

Following careful assessment of our choices we intend to build scale in high performing and high potential markets where we have the greatest ability to maintain or establish leading positions. We will reinforce our competitive advantage to differentiate and to drive leadership positions through investment in our proprietary data and technology, our people, our brand and reputation. Client feedback is consistent across Permanent recruitment and Temp & Contracting - they value recruitment agencies whose consultants provide deep specialism expertise and access to high quality candidates.

So, in every market we compete in, our ambition is clear: to grow, achieve leadership, and deliver the benefits that come with it: faster matching, greater exposure to higher-value roles, stronger margins, and better outcomes for clients and candidates. Where we can't, we'll step back and reallocate investment to generate superior returns elsewhere.

Progress on the design of our strategy and the shaping of a more competitive operating model is well underway. We are on track to share an update alongside our full-year results on 20 August 2026 and I would like to thank all our Hays colleagues for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Moving on to **current trading and guidance.**

1. Our actions to deliver strong consultant net fee productivity growth and cost discipline continued to offset our lower net fees in H2 26 and we currently expect FY26 pre-exceptional operating profit will be at the top of the £37.0-46.0m consensus range.
2. To date, we have observed minimal direct impact from developments in the Middle East, but we remain vigilant to the modest softening in Perm activity through the quarter in some markets. Given heightened levels of global macro-economic uncertainty, we continue to expect near term market conditions to remain challenging, with greater resilience in Temp & Contracting than in Perm.
3. We were pleased once again with our net fee productivity through Q4 and believe our Group consultant headcount capacity is appropriate for current market conditions and therefore expect it to remain broadly stable in Q1 27 as we balance focused investment in high performing and potential business lines with improving productivity in more challenging areas.
4. We will continue to structurally reduce our cost base, to support our investments in data and technology and position Hays strongly for when end markets recover. We will share more information regarding these initiatives and any associated restructuring charges at the full-year results in August.
5. There are no material working-day impacts anticipated in Q1 27.

I will now hand you back to the administrator, and we are happy to take your questions.

Q&A

If that is all the questions, thank you again for joining the call.

I look forward to speaking to you next at our full year results on 20th August. Should anyone have any follow up questions, Kean, Prash and I will be available to take calls for the rest of the day.