

State of the Workforce Survey 2023 Results

State of the Workforce 2023 examines the changing skills and labour market across the tourism and hospitality sector in Northern Ireland, incorporating the views of over 75 employers. The third in a **series of themed reports**, this edition focuses on training and development and examines the approaches being implemented by employers to enhance the skills of their teams.

Training and Development

What the research is telling us:

Training and development is imperative to upskill the workforce in response to the constantly evolving demands of the industry and to enhance productivity and performance, yet only 30% of employers feel the training they offer fully meets the skills needs of employees.

70%
of employers do not believe the training and development opportunities they offer fully meet the skills needs of employees



Challenges

Insufficient time and staffing challenges are the biggest training and development challenge for organisations, with backfilling the time needed to train staff raised as a cost and time issue. A number of businesses also point to a lack of funding and a lack of knowledge of the available training and education pathways.

The top five challenges businesses are experiencing in relation to training and development:



Coupled with these challenges, only 26% feel there are clear career progression routes in their organisation. Without strong career pathways in place that demonstrate the required skills and competencies to reach various roles and the available training and professional development to enhance skills, employees and their managers are unable to make informed decisions about their growth.

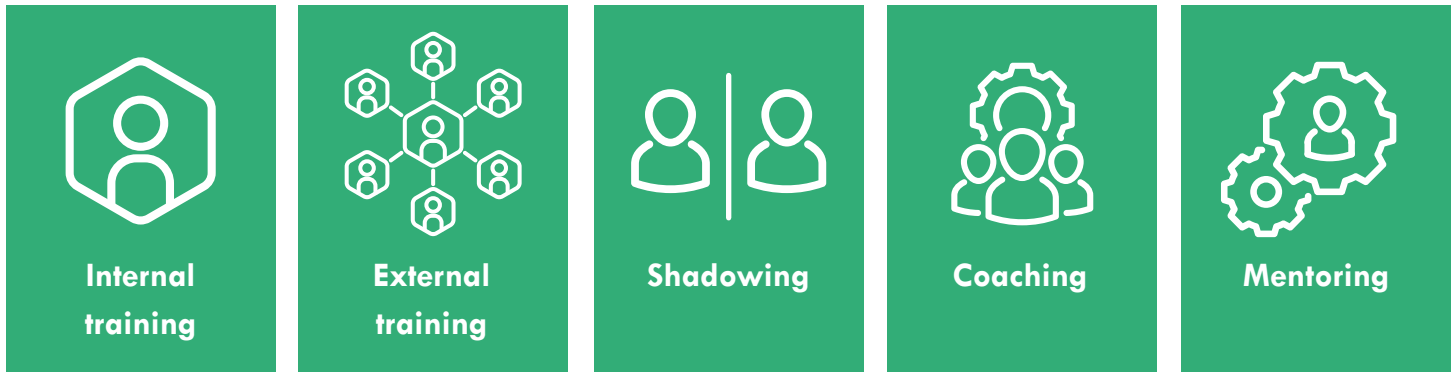
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Measuring impact

Effectiveness of training and development methods

Methods employers are finding most effective:

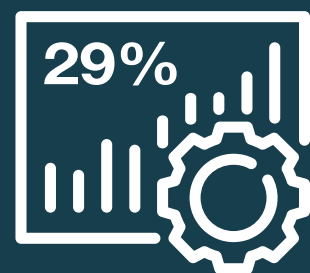


Methods employers would like to use more:



Only 29% of employers regularly measure the impact of training and development, meaning that whilst some may be investing significant resources in employee learning and development, without a system to measure training effectiveness, businesses may find themselves unsure of whether their investments are generating their desired results.

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Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a popular solution to creating and retaining a pipeline of diverse talent, trained in the specific skills needed for business challenges.

50%
of employers signpost to career
pathways and progression
opportunities through apprenticeships



Just over 15% of employers have experienced a challenge with embedding apprenticeships. The most common reasons cited are a lack of demand from employees and prospective employees. Employers had also expressed that age restrictions on apprenticeships had been an issue so the announcement by the Department for the Economy to introduce All Age Apprenticeships will be welcomed.



“It’s very hard to find local people that are interested in apprenticeships” - Employer

Viewpoints from employers on approaches and solutions



The learning and development offer is largely digital, or sometimes hybrid – the medium doesn’t always reflect skills need. In a people-centric industry, face-to-face learning helps nurture social skills and behaviours and critical thinking.



There’s a need for better linking up the system; industry inserting itself into further and higher education planning to make the case for targeted courses and direct promotion to students about career opportunities.



The learning and development offer should be refocused around digital skills development via on-the-job learning through role-based scenarios. This will encourage peer mentoring to target apparent skills gaps.



Bespoke, modular courses should be on offer that fill skills shortages and meet the workforce needs of the industry.



The benefits of an apprenticeship need to be better promoted. There are fantastic success stories which can help improve the appeal of the apprenticeships as a route into the sector.



Apprenticeships are an effective option and help build confidence in both digital and interpersonal skills, but Maths and English requirements still stand out as a significant barrier to many. Opening this up would support more people and improve social mobility.



The tendency to pay apprentices the minimum wage can present further issues. Paying apprentices properly would encourage participation in schemes and see apprentices recognised as valued colleagues.



It's imperative to focus on digital, green and social skills to take advantage of innovation and spur productivity growth.



Short pre-employment programmes focused on industry orientation and core / soft skills aimed at youth, adults, and marginalised groups will help provide industry with a pipeline of talent armed with the skills industry needs.

HATS Network response

Building a skilled and sustainable workforce is critical to the sector's recovery. As a sector, with the challenges faced post-pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to hit the reset button and do things differently, and do them better when it comes to skills and professional development.

We need to:

- Encourage investment in talent and skills through upskilling and re-skilling
- Raise the competence and performance of the existing workforce
- Build management and leadership capabilities to build resilience and aid retention
- Co-design agile, flexible and engaging interventions to respond to emerging skills needs such as social, digital and green
- Adopt apprenticeships as a prestigious choice for all ages
- Build a culture of ongoing skills development.



Employers that showcase themselves as committed to the growth and success of their workforce are more likely to foster company loyalty and boost staff morale.

Transitioning towards flexible learning pathways that connect different levels of learning is becoming increasingly important to bridge skills gaps. Incorporating various forms of learning that are more interactive and more manageable in modular format can play an important role, particularly if delivered in a timely fashion when an employee needs them. Embracing a learning culture where a business dedicates the time and resources necessary to support continuing skills development and career advancement will help to encourage lifelong learning, fostering engaged, agile, loyal talent with relevant skills and the flexibility to adapt.

There are pockets of best practice being highlighted that demonstrate the benefit of effective partnerships between employers and further and higher education which, if expanded can provide the sector with sustainable solutions to recruitment and the development of employee skills. Working with local colleges/universities/training providers is also a good way for businesses to understand more about the range of government programmes that are available for employers to upskill existing staff and hire new employees, some of which offer financial incentives.

To help to unlock the full potential of learning and development, measuring the effectiveness of training programmes is a critical factor for the sector and will ensure future investment is based on informed decisions that deliver impact.



Recommendations for employers

- Utilise available best practice resources in developing your people and multi-skilling your teams
- Connect with the available government **funded training programmes** through delivery partners to support workforce upskilling and re-skilling
- Invest in craft and higher level **apprenticeships** as a development pathway for your teams
- Prioritise developing management and leadership capabilities to aid employee engagement, wellbeing and retention
- Plan operations strategically and commit to releasing employees for management development and training programmes



Recommendations for partners

- Inspire, educate and share best practices in talent management
- Build employer awareness and understanding of available training supports
- Put a spotlight on management & leadership development
- Co-create flexible and agile skills interventions to respond to current and emerging needs to upskill existing workforce
- Encourage investment in talent and skills
- Combine resources and efforts to deliver meaningful impact

To view other reports in the series visit hatsnetwork.co.uk/state-of-the-workforce-2023

We would like to thank Hospitality Ulster, Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance and Tourism Northern Ireland for their support in disseminating the skills survey and encouraging their employer networks to take part.