



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

Oireachtas Committee Opening Statement: Dr Deirdre Curran, NUI Galway

My sincere thanks to you for the opportunity to submit to this committee for a 2nd time.

What I present here is empirical evidence from hospitality workers that can inform the discussion of sector revival and reform.

We have a chronic labour shortage in Hospitality and Tourism. Very little research is being done to explore the **causes from an employee perspective** with notable exceptions of sections of *Failte Ireland’s recent research publication ‘*Tourism Career: Labour Research*’ (2022), and a (2021) report by Regional Skills South East entitled ‘*South East Hospitality Industry Training & Education Review with Recommendations*’. The findings in both these reports are consistent with those of my own independent research ‘*Inside Out Hospitality*’ (2021).

42% of workers did not return to their pre-pandemic employer.	61% disagreed that they are paid what they’re worth
33% disagreed that the hours they worked were acceptable	68% are paid less than the current living wage
62% don’t get paid a Sunday Premium. 33% don’t get bank holiday pay	Better pay/entitlements/perks were listed as retention incentives

Extracts from Failte Ireland’s findings 2022

In my professional opinion, we are at a unique **tipping point**. The pandemic facilitated ‘pause-for-thought’ for hospitality workers, employers, and their representative bodies.

Many of the employee challenges presented here far out-date the pandemic and yet, for decades little or nothing was done to address them. The current shortage of staff has forced employers to pay attention to long-standing issues. Much of what their representatives are proposing are short-term, fracture-filling, quick-fixes which will, at best, deal with an immediate crisis of labour.

Employer representative bodies are calling for the mass production of **permits** to allow for the importation of non-EU labour. What is being sought is arguably a cheaper, more compliant workforce. I would urge the exercise extreme caution in acceding to this demand.

Without addressing the challenges of breaches of employment rights, ill-treatment, and lack of opportunities in the sector we would simply be subjecting vulnerable imported labour to conditions as bad, if not worse, than have been endured by our own citizens for decades.

Budget 2022 saw a **€35million increase** in the **Tourism Marketing Fund** from Minister Martin. I would seriously question the use of such funds to market Tourism &

Hospitality careers to 2nd-level students without addressing the flaws in pay and conditions.

My motives for conducting the research outlined in this document were twofold (a) to give hospitality workers a voice and (b), inform the debate on much-needed sector reform. This is the second phase of a research agenda that will keep me occupied for some years to come.

1.1 Research Project 1

The specific objective of this project was to conduct an in-depth exploration of why some hospitality workers chose to remain in the sector through the pandemic, and why others chose to leave. The research I conducted is a small/deep study drawing on three methods.

[1] A brief on-line survey to gather bio and experience details from the participants, including length/type of service, training and qualifications, pay and conditions. The survey also established whether respondents had remained or left the sector.

[2] Participants submitted audio files in response to the following brief.

You have been invited by a government-sponsored special task force on Hospitality and Tourism to provide your views on the following questions:

What are the three biggest challenges faced by workers in hospitality and tourism?

What three recommendations you would suggest to make hospitality and tourism a more attractive place to work?

[3] Each participant took part in an in-depth interview with me to discuss their motives for staying/leaving the sector, their working conditions emerging from the pandemic, and the challenges they face. These interviews are still on-going.

BOX 1 below presents a summary of the themes emerging from the audio files

AUDIO FILES – CHALLENGES EMERGING

- Over-worked and over-whelmed
- Working hours V actual hours
- Risk to health from Covid
- Post-pandemic insecurity around the stability of the sector
- Staff shortages- untrained recruits
- Customer (bad) behaviour
- Wages V inflation
- Work-life balance and adequate rest
- The poor working conditions and ill-treatment which preceded pandemic

BOX 2 below presents the recommendations from workers

AUDIO FILES – RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING

- Raise awareness and address bullying
- Give staff sufficient rest
- Give workers a voice
- Wage progression
- Management training
- Additional benefits (health insurance, pension, sick leave etc.)
- More training and development
- Fair treatment and equality
- Explore how can technology can help hospitality work
- Team building and bonding to help with stress
- acknowledging contribution
- Campaign to raise public awareness of the hard physical and emotional work done by hospitality workers
- Educate staff re wellbeing, stress management, aggression etc.
- Have all the HR processes right
- Groom better leaders with compassion
- Apprenticeship programme
- Oversight and laws to ensure WLB
- Transparency and fairness in tips distribution

*Here is your
[part] answer to
staff shortages!*

BOX 3 below presents a summary of themes emerging from the interviews

INTERVIEWS – EMERGING FINDINGS

Only one respondent was satisfied that his job met most of the **features of decent work** illustrated in the graphic below. {That person does not currently work in Ireland}

Most of those interviewed feel that hospitality work has gotten worse since emerging from pandemic (for reasons outlined in Box 1).

Most of those interviewed to date would not be able to meet an unexpected medical bill of €2,000. To secure a mortgage and the prospect of a family, workers chose to leave. And inflation is rising!

For those who left, it was a decision of the head rather than the heart. They would have stayed if conditions and prospects were better.

For many of those who stayed, there were constraints on them that limited their alternatives in terms of employment.

What is Decent Work?



Secure Employment



Fair wages



Safe working conditions



Social protection



Social Dialogue



Labour Rights and Standards

1.3 Research Project 2:

A colleague from Shannon College of Hotel Management (Dr Finian O Driscoll) and I are writing up a **Hotel Case Study of Good Practice**. The large hotel is embarking on a journey of transformative change including offering employees better terms, conditions, and benefits. If the hotel delivers on its plans, it will represent a beacon of leadership for the industry.

1.4 Other Research Emerging

In February **2022** my colleague Maureen Maloney and a team of students from the *HR Practice* class at NUIG conducted **research in the hospitality and retail sectors** exploring employee experiences through the lens of decent work. They distributed an on-line survey and received 395 responses (220 from hospitality workers).

The findings are still being analysed but hospitality was consistently worse than retail, and some notable emerging details are presented in brief below.

SURVEY QUESTION	RESPONSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have witnessed or experienced discrimination at work 	1 in 5 agree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel protected from emotional and verbal abuse 	1 in 5 disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tasks that I perform at work put me at risk of physical injury 	1 in 4 agree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My organisation respects my mental health 	1 in 5 disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have experienced or observed workplace abuse 	3 in 10 agree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees' views are valued at my workplace 	1 in 5 disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there was an incident at work which upset me, I would feel comfortable raising it with my manager 	1 in 5 disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My work schedule changes at short notice 	6 in 10 agree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I receive adequate time for breaks at work 	3 in 10 disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I receive the following sick days from my current organisation 	6 in 10 say None

International Collaborations

In 2019 I designed an on-line survey to collect data on the lived experience of hospitality workers. The survey had 38 questions almost half asking for more details in a text box. The survey was one of three methods employed and the findings were presented in a research report entitled '*Inside Out Hospitality*'.

<https://www.nuigalway.ie/media/schoolofbusinessandconomics/files/INSIDE-OUT-HOSPITALITY.pdf>

Since publishing that report my survey has been/is being replicated in Scotland, NZ, Australia, Spain, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Sweden.

This Global Alliance is bringing in a huge amount of cross-national data that will allow comparative work to be undertaken. Countries will be able to benchmark their performance against others and the scope for shared learning is immense.

1.6 Recommendations emerging from research to date

- ✚ Act on the excellent recommendations of workers contributing to this [and other] research
- ✚ Over-arching National Body monitoring (& enforcing) standards and providing Cert-type training and a Qmark of good practice
- ✚ Promote ethical leadership
- ✚ Targeted WRC Inspector campaign

- ✚ Invest in training over marketing
- ✚ Proper apprenticeships including education on rights and resilience
- ✚ Create a platform for worker voice

1.7 Respectful requests to the committee

I would ask each of you, as public representatives with power and influence, to provoke/support/encourage efforts of hospitality reform consistent with the ILO dimensions of **decent work**.

Finally, please continue to find ways for the **worker voice** to be heard in debates on how the sector can recover and thrive, for the benefit of workers, employers, customers, and broader society. The voice of workers is conspicuously absent on task forces and reform bodies. This gap in this direct representation is not only unjust it also acts to the detriment of the revival and reform of this important economic sector.



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