

MIDLANDS ENGINE OBSERVATORY ACADEMIC INSIGHTS

Student experiences in the hospitality sector



Theme:

The hospitality sector provides many young people and students with their first jobs. It plays a key role in developing their workplace skills and attitudes to work.

Area of Focus:

Despite the hospitality sector's need for workers, students are often not seen as the solution and not given the training and support they require or encouraged to consider careers in the sector.

Key Findings:

Students are increasingly working whilst studying to support themselves through university. They take on customer-facing jobs in hospitality attracted by the sector's promise of flexible work through zero-hour contracts. However, research to date has overlooked students' experiences as workers and their contribution.

Students are often working 20-30 hours a week, which can impact university performance and wellbeing. Many student hospitality workers experience anxiety around instability of income or stress around scheduling. Flexible work is largely employer-driven, and some student-workers feel replaceable or left out because they are treated as transient and temporary workers. High staff turnover, feeling under-valued, and a lack of training can all cause students to leave. Student-workers also face other challenges such as difficult customers, anti-social behaviour, and sexual harassment.

Student-workers have the potential to become critically important in filling labour shortages in UK hospitality. However, HR practices in the sector need to evolve to better support student-workers and their need for flexibility. Employers would benefit from valuing students as an important part of their workforce through providing better support, training, career mentoring and development opportunities. As students' experiences in hospitality have an impact on their view of work and skills, universities could do more to support working students and hospitality employers and view the increasing number of working students as an opportunity to engage with employers and contribute to the local economy in new ways.



Midlands Engine Impact:

- The State of the Region Report 2021 identified the Arts and Culture sector and the Visitor Economy Sector as at risk, due to the extended lockdowns and periods of restrictions. Brexit has also reduced the skills available among the workforce.
- The region is home to many universities, and therefore many students. This means that many students across the region could or already are working in hospitality. These students could be better supported by both their employers and universities.
- Developing a well-trained workforce in the hospitality and visitor economy sector will help economic growth in the region, as it supports marketing of destinations, improves service, and encourages greater investment in the sector.

For Further Information Contact:

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