

Summary

A qualitative investigation into the experiences of workers in the hospitality sector in Scotland

Katharine Stockland, Jasmin Rostron and Johnny Runge, National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR)

On Behalf of the Fair Work Convention

January 2023

Executive Summary

This research examines experiences of fair work in the hospitality industry in Scotland. The research was conducted by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) on behalf of the Fair Work Convention. The project involved semi-structured interviews with 30 hospitality workers and the analysis of video diaries completed by 14 hospitality workers.

The report focuses on the perspectives and lived experiences of hospitality workers. In particular, it explores the impacts of precarious work, low pay and poor working conditions on the physical, mental and social well-being of those working in the hospitality industry. It also looks at how these experiences have been adversely affected by recent social and political events, particularly COVID-19, Brexit, industry-wide staff shortages and the cost-of-living crisis. The research presents a diversity of voices and experiences, including those of women, workers with recent histories of migration to Scotland and workers in rural and island locations in Scotland; many of whom face a unique set of challenges in the hospitality industry. The report additionally explores positive experiences of work among hospitality workers, relating particularly to their everyday relationships with customers and with co-workers. Finally, the report looks at workers' views and experiences of progression and training as well as communication and voice in the workplace.

It is worth noting that while many of the workers in our sample have had difficult experiences in the hospitality sector, we also spoke to people who reported enjoying their work and experiencing good working conditions. This suggests that experiences of fair work may vary considerably across the sector. We recognise that this study is based on a relatively small sample of hospitality workers. In the conclusion to the report, therefore, we suggest where further research could usefully explore the nature and extent of certain experiences across the sector.

The findings of our study, across ten different themes, are summarised below.

Findings on working hours

Precarious working hours can have detrimental impacts on the financial, personal, and social well-being of hospitality workers.

Our research illustrates the significant impact that precarious working hours can have on the well-being of hospitality workers. Specifically, our research provides numerous examples of workers who were unable to plan when or how much they would be working from week to week. These problems were most acute for those on zero-hours contracts although they could also occur for some on part-time and full-time contracts, who reported that their working hours and shift patterns could vary significantly on a weekly or even daily basis. These uncertainties created financial insecurity and hardship for some workers, as well as experiences of social and personal hardship, given that they were unable to plan or invest time in social relationships and valued past-times outside work.

Zero-hours contracts work best for people who require flexibility, who see their jobs as temporary or secondary to other work, and who can rely on alternative sources of income.

Our research provides examples of hospitality workers who reported valuing the flexibility afforded to them by working in the hospitality industry, typically because they were students, carers, or working full-time in other sectors. Many of these workers told us that they valued the fact that zero-hours contracts allowed them to vary their hours on a weekly basis, depending on their availability. However, these workers also stressed that their working patterns were acceptable to them either only on a short-term basis or as long as they could depend on other sources of income, such as through student loans, other jobs, or family members.

Workers on zero-hours contracts can often feel pressured to accept unwanted hours, particularly within the context of staff shortages.

While many hospitality workers valued the flexibility afforded to them by zero-hours contracts, some of these workers simultaneously found that they were often unable to utilise this flexibility. Our research provides examples of hospitality workers on zero-hours contracts who felt under pressure to accept more hours than they wished to work, often due to concerns that refusing work would reduce their capacity to obtain work in the future. Some workers also reported feeling obligated to accept hours in order to reduce the stress of managers or co-workers, particularly in the context of staff shortages. We provide examples of how this pressure to accept work could negatively impact on the ability of some workers to fulfil their responsibilities outside of their work, such as family responsibilities

Working long and anti-social hours can detrimentally impact the physical and mental health of hospitality workers.

Our research provides examples of hospitality workers who reported routinely working long hours – often as much as 80 or 90 hours per week. Some workers also reported working for weeks at a time, without any time off. These research participants were typically, but not exclusively, chefs or workers at management level. Some workers reported being paid for all these hours, while others were not. Those on annualised salaries were least likely to be paid for overtime. Many of these workers reported experiencing chronic tiredness, stress and reduced productivity as a result of long hours, as well as detrimental impacts on their relationships with family and friends.

Hospitality workers can appreciate working anti-social hours, such as evenings, nights and weekends, as it allows them the flexibility to fulfil other responsibilities, for example as students, carers, or workers in other sectors. However, hospitality workers also reported similar negative effects with anti-social hours as with long hours, such as stress, tiredness, reduced productivity, an inability to spend time with family and friends, and, in some cases, experiences of depression.

Findings on pay

Hospitality workers may be particularly likely to feel that their pay is unfair if they are routinely asked to carry out responsibilities beyond their pay grade. Similarly, workers may view their pay as unfair if they feel that they are using skills and experience for which they are not being adequately remunerated.

Our research provides examples of hospitality workers who were routinely performing managerial or other additional responsibilities for which they were not adequately remunerated. These workers typically reported feeling that their pay was unfair. Workers who felt that they had skills or experiences that contributed to their performance, but for which they were not remunerated, also expressed sentiments that their pay was unfair.

While the majority of our research participants reported being paid accurately and in accordance with the law, this report provides examples of hospitality workers who have experienced a variety of unfair and illegal practices around pay. Such practices can result in employees feeling anxiety and distrust in relation to their current employers, even when these negative experiences had occurred in previous jobs.

A number of the hospitality workers in our sample reported having had negative experiences around pay, most of which had occurred in previous hospitality jobs. These experiences included: not being paid accurately for hours worked; the withholding of holiday or sick pay; deductions to their pay that were deemed as unfair; failures to distribute service charges; and being paid 'off the books' in cash. Other workers told us that they had not experienced these practices directly but that they believed them to be fairly common in the hospitality industry in general.

Many hospitality workers who had had negative experiences reported sentiments of distrust or anxiety in relation to their employers, even when these negative experiences had occurred with previous employers. These concerns could manifest in certain behaviours, such as always recording their hours and checking their payslips, or asking to see a record of service charges. Such concerns could also contribute to more general sentiments of dissatisfaction in the workplace and to the desire to move jobs, including leaving the hospitality sector entirely.

Workers on zero-hours contracts may show a poor understanding of their rights around holiday and sick pay.

Many of the workers in our sample on zero-hours contracts reported not receiving holiday or sick pay and being confused about their rights in relation to these. Moreover, some of those who had received holiday pay reported that this occurred only when they had requested it from their employers.

Findings on working conditions

Hospitality workers can experience their work as physically demanding, particularly due to the requirement to stand for long periods of time. Some hospitality workers can also find their work mentally demanding, and at times stressful, due to the need to deliver high-quality service under pressure.

Many of the hospitality workers in our sample complained of experiencing pain in their back or in their feet, particularly due to the requirement to stand for long periods of time. We also spoke to hospitality workers who had experienced injuries and developed long-term health conditions which they attributed to prolonged periods of standing. Many hospitality workers additionally reported experiencing general physical fatigue or even exhaustion after their shifts. Some of the chefs that we interviewed reported additional physical challenges, such as working in hot kitchens and suffering from injuries due to repetitive actions or heavy lifting.

Hospitality workers who reported finding their work mentally or emotionally demanding typically attributed this to the demands of customer service, particularly the need to deliver high-quality and efficient service under pressure.

Regular breaks can help hospitality workers cope with the physical and mental demands of their work. However, hospitality workers may have limited flexibility as to when they take their breaks, or may not take any at all, despite working long shifts.

While many of the hospitality workers in our sample reported that regular breaks helped them to manage the physical and mental demands of their work, many simultaneously reported either not taking breaks, or having limited flexibility as to when they took them. They typically attributed this to venues being busy or to staff shortages. Most workers who did take breaks reported having to enforce these themselves, as opposed to breaks being enforced by supervisors or managers.

Findings on relationships with customers

Interactions with customers can be a significant source of job satisfaction – and of meaning and purpose – for hospitality workers.

Most of the hospitality workers in our sample reported that interactions with customers were the best part of their jobs. They described these interactions as enjoyable and energising and, in some cases, as providing a sense of greater meaning and purpose to their work.

Hospitality workers may also find interactions with customers demanding and stressful, particularly when customers complain, when they are drunk, or when they are abusive.

Most of the hospitality workers in our sample reported having had experienced distress caused by their customers. They highlighted three particular types of situations that could be particularly difficult: dealing with drunk customers, dealing

with customers' complaints, and dealing with customers that were physically or verbally abusive.

Women working in the hospitality industry may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing abuse and harassment from customers.

Our research highlights examples of women who have experienced sexual harassment from customers in the workplace. It also highlights examples of hospitality workers who have witnessed this behaviour from customers towards women colleagues. Further research is needed to ascertain the extent and nature of these experiences in the sector.

Findings on relationships with co-workers

Relationships with co-workers can be central to job fulfilment and satisfaction for hospitality workers

Most of the hospitality workers in our study reported having close relationships with co-workers, often likening these relationships to friendships or even family relationships. These relationships were a central aspect of these workers' enjoyment and satisfaction in their work.

Hospitality workers who work in restaurants, kitchens or other high-pressure environments may feel particularly vulnerable to experiences of bullying from managers.

A number of the hospitality workers in our sample reported experiencing or witnessing bullying or difficult behaviour from managers, albeit to different degrees. Chefs and those who worked with chefs were particularly likely to report that verbal abuse was commonplace in restaurant kitchens, although some workers believed that this had improved in recent years. Some workers in other, non-kitchen contexts also expressed the view that the pressures of delivering good customer service on time contributed to bullying and abusive behaviours among senior staff across the hospitality sector. Given these provisional findings, further research is needed to ascertain the nature and extent of these experiences among hospitality workers in different environments.

Hospitality workers in our sample often changed jobs frequently. We identified a number of different factors leading to high turnover in the hospitality industry, such as relationships with supervisors, working conditions, hours and pay. One of the most common themes was that workers often used the ability to move jobs as a strategy to deal with bad treatment, such as bullying and harassment.

Findings on communication in the workplace

An absence of formal avenues for communication in the workplace, in combination with low expectations around progression, may contribute to a lack of effective voice among workers in the hospitality industry.

Many of the hospitality workers in our sample expressed a sense that they did not see a role for their views and opinions on how things were run in the workplace. This was particularly common among workers who saw their jobs as temporary or secondary to other jobs or commitments. It is also noteworthy that most of these workers reported having no or irregular formal avenues for communication with managers or supervisors, such as meetings or appraisals.

The ability to advocate for oneself is seen as vital by some hospitality workers for avoiding experiences of exploitation in the industry.

Self-advocacy emerged as a theme in relation to several different topics in our research. In particular, some hospitality workers emphasised that in order to ensure good working conditions, pay and hours in the industry, it was important to learn about one's rights and to defend one's rights during interactions with employers. These hospitality workers typically saw this sort of knowledge and confidence as something that they developed through experience in the industry over time, as well as something that came with greater personal financial security. It could also be affected by their migration status and confidence in the English language. The nature of their relationship with their employer may well also be a factor, although interestingly our research suggests that it cannot be assumed that employees with a close and trusting relationship with their employers are any more likely to advocate for themselves than those with a difficult or conflictual relationship. The research found examples of hospitality workers who acknowledged the stress or financial struggles of their employers, and did therefore not want to cause tension due to their good relationship.

Other workers felt that there should be more external, independent support and advice available to hospitality workers. Trade unions could be a potential support mechanism, but most of our research participants were not members of a union, often because they had not considered it or were aware of options for hospitality unions.

Findings on progression and training

Precarious working hours, low pay, and experiences of working long and anti-social hours can affect workers' wishes for progression within the hospitality industry.

When discussing progression opportunities, the hospitality workers in our study often cited low pay and precarious working hours as a reason for not pursuing progression opportunities within the sector or as a reason for seeing their hospitality work as temporary or secondary to jobs in other sectors.

Our research also provides examples of hospitality workers who had chosen to take jobs with less responsibility, lower pay, and less secure hours than in their previous jobs because they felt that they were less likely to be expected to work long, unpaid hours in these more insecure working arrangements.

The hospitality industry is seen by some workers as offering good and fair opportunities for progression, both in terms of income and skills.

While some of the hospitality workers in our sample expressed little desire to progress in the industry, others stated that they saw significant opportunities for progression in the industry. This was particularly the case among chefs, managers and those working with specialist produce, such as wine or coffee. Some of these workers also expressed a sense that the industry worked on 'meritocratic principles' insofar as experience, hard work, and skills were more important for progression than social background or qualifications.

Opportunities to improve skills and qualifications can positively impact on sentiments of job satisfaction and the desire to stay in the industry among hospitality workers.

While the majority of workers in our sample had received little formal training, our research also provides examples of workers who have pursued more formal qualifications and training experiences, either independently or facilitated by their employers. These were typically chefs, those working at managerial level, or those working with specialist produce, such as wine or coffee. These workers cited this training as improving their sense of satisfaction in their current workplace and as a motivating factor for staying in the industry.

By contrast, other hospitality workers in our sample cited a lack of interest in pursuing training: this was typically either because they saw their work as temporary or secondary to their work in other industries, or because it was because they felt that their existing experience in the industry was adequate to perform their current job.

Findings on social and political contexts

The COVID-19 pandemic placed additional pressures on some hospitality workers and has led some to question their future in the industry.

Our research suggests that the pandemic has placed additional pressures on some hospitality workers. For most of the workers in our sample, the pandemic had some or all of the following impacts: it created or worsened financial hardship; added to anxiety and uncertainty about future work prospects; created extra demands in the workplace, particularly in terms of managing customers; and contributed to staff shortages, which again created additional stressors and pressures. Some of our participants reported feeling less certain about their own future in the hospitality industry as a result of the pandemic, as they felt the pandemic had highlighted the uncertainties involved in being dependent on hospitality work for a regular income.

Hospitality workers typically see staff shortages as having contributed to a worsening in their working conditions, although some also believe that they have forced employers to raise standards.

Almost all of the participants that we interviewed had observed that their workplaces and/or the industry as a whole were experiencing significant staff shortages. Many of these participants linked staff shortages to the COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects, although many also saw them as a product of Brexit as well as longer-term issues with recruitment and retention in the hospitality industry due to poor working conditions and low pay.

Most participants reported that staff shortages had made their working conditions worse, particularly in terms of having to work longer or unwanted hours, feeling under increased pressure in the workplace, and being unable to take adequate breaks. Some participants, however, reported anecdotal observations that standards in the industry were improving as employers seek to recruit and retain more staff.

Findings on migrant workers

People with recent histories of migration may feel particularly vulnerable to exploitation around pay and/or hours.

Our research provides examples of hospitality workers who have migrated within the last ten years from countries in eastern Europe and who reported feeling particularly vulnerable to exploitation within the industry because of their position as migrants. These workers attributed this sense of vulnerability both to the exploitative or prejudiced attitudes of certain employers, as well as to a sense that they cannot – or could not in the past – advocate for themselves, due to poor English language skills or a poor understanding of the legal and ethical norms in the industry.

People with histories of migration can experience racist abuse in the hospitality industry, both from co-workers and from customers.

Our research shows that migrants working in the hospitality industry may experience abuse based on their skin colour and/or their accents, both from customers and from co-workers. Such experiences can contribute to feelings of anxiety and being unsafe in the workplace, and feelings of frustration and anger at being unfairly treated. However, not all of the migrant workers that we interviewed reported these experiences. Further research is needed to establish the extent of such experiences in the hospitality industry, and why some workers may be more vulnerable to abuse than others.

Findings on working in rural areas

Hospitality workers in rural areas can face a unique set of challenges.

Hospitality workers in rural or island locations in Scotland reported particular challenges relating to these locations. In particular, they talked about an inability to find affordable accommodation, which meant they often had to either commute long distances or live in staff accommodation, both of which could detrimentally impact on their family and social lives outside work. This could also mean that these workers were more likely to see their jobs as temporary, as they felt they would be unable to settle in the area in the long-term. Workers in rural areas also expressed concerns that they were more vulnerable to experiencing the negative consequences of staff shortages and price rises.



Worker Stories

Presented below are eight 'Worker Stories'. Each Worker Story provides an in-depth exploration of the experiences of a single hospitality worker. These workers were chosen and interviewed in the same manner as the other research participants. They were chosen not necessarily for their representativeness of all workers in our sample but, rather, for their capacity to shed light in a detailed and nuanced manner on certain experiences among workers in the sector. Some of their details, such as names and ages, have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Alek

Age: 35

Nationality: Polish

Residency: EU Settled Status

Work History: Chef

Takeaway: Alek has experienced illegal and unfair practices multiple times in the hospitality industry over the last decade, which he links to being a migrant. He feels strongly that his experiences have improved as he has learnt to advocate for himself and to be vigilant for unscrupulous employers.

Alek came to Scotland in 2018 from Poland. When he arrived in Scotland, he already had considerable experience as a chef which he had obtained both in Poland and in other European countries, allowing him to find a job quickly in a restaurant in Glasgow. He had worked in a number of different hotels and restaurants since then, although when we



interviewed him, he had recently quit his last sous-chef job and was working for an agency on a zero-hours contract while looking for another permanent position. He was also studying full-time for a diploma in hospitality management at a higher education college, which he explained to us was an important step for his longer-term ambitions of opening his own restaurant.

In our interview, Alek spoke in depth about the poor and often exploitative workplace practices that he had experienced in the hospitality industry in Scotland. He described overwork, and low and unfair pay, as endemic to the industry and he cited this as the primary reason for why he left his most recent permanent position:

"I was doing the head chef position actually so I was doing the orders, I was doing the trainings, all the

management things you know you need to do at the kitchen, it was actually on my head so I was doing all that stuff but they were paying me for [a lower position] So yes it was very unfair because I was doing the majority of the jobs there and I should get paid like at least £16, £15 an hour and they were paying me just £10 an hour which was very weak. Just I am not a quitter and I promised to help them so I was keeping and keeping and keeping and then they asked me if I want to be a manager of the restaurant and I said but the way you were treating me before, now asking me to be a manager so you want me to do more things and pay probably what more. Oh we gonna pay you more. How much? Oh £2 more. I was like what? On top of the cheffing. So after that conversation I said guys really I quit because that is too much, you know like how you treat the people and how you expect from people to work is unbelievable you know.”

Alek told us that he did want to find a permanent position again in the future, given that such jobs came with benefits that agency work did not, such as holiday pay and pensions. Moreover, he noted that it could be stressful moving so regularly between kitchens, as you had to constantly adapt to new menus and working practices in very short spaces of time. However, he noted that there were advantages to zero-hours work, namely that he is never expected to work without being paid:

“[With agency work] you start from ten and you finish at ten, you don’t stay longer. Usually [with a] kitchen, if you are on the contract, you should finish at ten, [but] you still need to clean the kitchen, still need to finish things you didn’t finish because of the service and you need to finish them because

tomorrow you have [a] function... Usually if you are on the contract then they don’t pay for it... So I do all that [extra work] and they don’t pay for it. [But with] the agency, I just finish at ten and that’s it, because my contract is from ten to ten, I finish.”

In addition to experiences of working unpaid overtime, Alek described to us past experiences in various jobs of not being paid accurately, not being paid a fair share of tips, not receiving sick pay, and experiencing unexpected deductions to his pay:

“At the beginning they were deducting things like [saying] some customers were unhappy, like a huge charge. It’s not a fault of the kitchen or the restaurant, it’s the fault of the management because they did something wrong, they explained things wrong and then the customers were unhappy from the beginning so they were trying to put the fault on everyone, just not the management and then like get the pay slip and you see like minus £40 and you’re like what the ... why?... So [usually] they take like from the service charge. Because they cannot take from the salary.

[Also] once I was sick for two days and they should pay the sick days yes, but they never did... And they actually minus £80. And it was like whoa, so what I didn’t get my monthly pay and you just took minus £90 because I didn’t appear at work because I was at sick and I actually got the papers from the doctor.”

The most substantial deduction he had ever experienced was over £1000 when he crashed the company car while running a kitchen errand – something that he attributed to tiredness given he had worked 340 hours that month:

“Yes, even if you are overtired because you are working 240 hours last month and then you get tired you know and then you just feel sick because of too many hours you do..... I remember the time I was doing 340 hours a month.... Then I need to drive somewhere [to pick up supplies for the restaurant] and I was so tired that I didn't notice that something is behind me and it was the company car so they charged me for the repairs.... And that was the time I was doing this 340 hours a month so I was doing 16 hours a day with no day off for a month....then they still took from my salary £1,000.”

Crucially, a central narrative running throughout Alek's account of his experiences was that he had been more vulnerable to exploitation because he was a migrant and because, initially, he did not speak good English. He believed that employers purposefully selected migrants for kitchen work, as they were less likely to know their rights and more likely to accept poor conditions:

“They use the people from other countries to say ‘you need to do [this]’ and they [just accept it] and then they say ‘we are going to pay you’ but they never pay you for that...Especially when I was working for the [luxury hotel] and even now when I speak with friends and they say yes it was a bit abuse of Polish people because they mostly hire people from Poland because they realise they work hard and we don't ask, you know, we are going to work for free just because we work there and we want that job you know.”

When reflecting on his own attitude in his early days in Scotland, he emphasised how not speaking the

language affected his confidence and his ability to reject poor conditions:

“It's hard to explain, you are not fine and feel... like you're not from here and even if you want to answer you [are] scared to answer because of how you speak. You know like it sounds very silly or you don't know the words, you know when you're going to say something it sounds silly... Language is a huge barrier you know... I was like forced to [do] everything they were asking me for.”

Alek also recounted experiences of witnessing similar dynamics of exploitation among other hospitality workers:

“I worked for [this restaurant] and...they were hiring, they didn't like the people who knew how the hospitality worked so they never hire anyone from Scotland. Always were hiring people from outside. And they always were looking for someone who don't have a huge experience....then they started to hire people from India and then it was very like very, very bad, like they didn't pay them for like three months...and they were still working there because their culture, you know, they're going to stay until they get paid, [then eventually] they get paid and they still stay there because they were happy they get paid you know. And it is like oh my god, so hard to even explain to those people that it is not how [it should be] just find another job.”

However, Alek also repeatedly emphasised that his attitude had changed over the years and that now he felt confident to seek out and accept only fair pay and conditions. He stated that was a product of his increased experience in the industry, his good language skills, and his studies in hospitality management.

Indeed, he told us that his experiences of poor conditions had been a key motivating factor in undertaking the studies, as he wanted to understand how to improve his own situation and also how to do things differently when he opened his own restaurant one day:

“I decide to study because I learned that you need to know the law, you need to know how things are working from inside. So I just quit and decided to educate myself and be more confident not to just listen to people and believe everything they say you know.”

He described to us how, in various ways, he now ensured his working conditions were fair:

“I am quite aggressive with the pay and I don't accept the low pay. But they always try to pay you as low as you can. Then you say no, no, no... Right now they don't even try...because of [my] education and because of 15 years in hospitality and because of how I speak with them. I think I am more confident....So when they say they going to pay you, I will say 'okay so let's sign the contract that you're going to pay me, right now, you know?' I don't believe you know, I am not going to work for free, you can fire me, it's fine but you cannot fire me actually because I actually do everything and you need to have reason to fire me... I know how to protect myself now.

I always now ask for signed things. I always ask for it and say okay [if] it's a

service charge please make a contract up I am going to get paid for every single service charge. And... I want to see how much the customers paid so I know how much we should get paid and I can actually you know get the money to people if they try to be cheeky you know.... Next week Monday I go for trial shift for two hours. It's more I want to check the company...not the company want to check you.... [I want to check] how they treat the people, how they speak to the people, if they paid the extras they promised they're going to pay.”

Despite Alek's increased confidence and experience in the industry, it is noteworthy that he was hesitant to take on a job as head chef – he noted that this was primarily because he felt the extra responsibility, work and pressure was not worth the likely remuneration.

“Yes, I am mostly sous chef, I don't want to take a head chef position because that's almost same money and heck much more work to do...It's like £3,000 more a year but then you do twice as much...the £3,000 I can earn in my free time, [but] the head chef going to do the paperwork”.

Instead, therefore, Alek was continuing with his intention to complete his studies while working as a sous-chef in the hope of opening his own restaurant in the near future.

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Amy

Age: 24

Nationality: Scottish

Work History: Experience as an events worker, stewardess, and as a bartender

Takeaway: Felt that managers and co-workers treated her unfairly because of her young age.

Amy, a 24-year-old woman, had worked in the hospitality sector since leaving school at 18. She had previous experience as an events worker, stewardess, and as a bartender. At the time of the video diary, she was using an app and an agency to find work. In her video diaries, which she completed over six working days, Amy described two negative interactions with her managers. Firstly, she experienced difficulties with the app which she uses to find shifts. On three separate occasions in one week, shift patterns were listed earlier on the employer's work portal and later on hers. This meant she showed up late to work and was sent home earlier than expected. On one occasion, her manager became aggravated and shouted at her:

"I walked in, and the supervisor just kinda shouted at me, and he was like, who are you? And I was like, I'm [Amy] and he started saying that



they had me down as like a 6:30 start, instead of a 8:30 start and he's being really aggressive and like wouldn't believe me until I actually opened up the work portal and it said 8:30 on it and he wound his neck back... but it kind of set a precedent for the day."

The uncertainty of her shift arrangements during this week had distressed her as she had planned her week and her finances around these working hours which then turned out to be incorrect. She contested this via the app and was told that she would be paid until her finishing time, as the mix-up had been their fault. She was not convinced, however, that they would do as promised.

Later that week, when working with the agency, she was scheduled to work early on a Sunday morning. However, a lack of public transport at that time made it impossible for her to make it on time for the morning shift. She approached her managers to see if she could be moved to a later shift that same Sunday and was met with a negative response. Interestingly, during this interaction, she felt that her managers were making unfair assumptions about her based on her relatively young age:

“They kind of belittled me about it and I was annoyed and the first thing they asked me they were like, who do you live with? And I said well I stay at home right now and they just had an attitude and they were calling me mollycoddles and stuff like that....So that annoyed me about because... as much as I'd like to do the shift I can't but it was just the way they were speaking to me. It was as if like oh, I've led a sheltered life and I wouldn't, can't get up too early as if I haven't been getting up early at four in the morning for the past week to work there and [...] I was made out to be a spoiled brat because I can't get there.”

Furthermore, talking generally about her experiences at work, she commented that despite her years of experience in hospitality, she was treated differently at work due to her colleagues' assumptions relating to her age.

“I think the worst thing is because they are a bit older than me and I'm relatively new like to the [venue] that we were working. And even though I've worked with that company for six years, they sort of look down on me a bit, and over explain things to me that I'm very well aware of and I know so that kind of gets to me sometimes because it's like a weird hierarchy. I don't know, it's like, it doesn't matter how long you've worked in that profession. If you're younger than someone, they will automatically assume that you're incapable of doing your job that you've probably been doing just as long as them.”

Amy told us that she was not interested in continuing to work in hospitality and gave a variety of reasons for disliking her work, particularly these negative relationships with colleagues and

managers, as well as at times with customers. She also told us that she felt physically and mentally drained: physically due to having to stand on her feet throughout her shift and mentally as her role often left her feeling bored, which negatively impacted her mental health.

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Vicki

Age: 28

Nationality: Australia

Residency: Holds a work visa. Lives in a small town with partner and daughter in Perthshire.

Work History: Worked in Australia as a manager in hospitality. In Scotland, she has worked as waitress, receptionist, and bartender.

Takeaway: Vicki has enjoyed working in hospitality over the years but has found the hours, stress, and responsibility of her work difficult to manage alongside her family responsibilities, in particular as she has struggled to find affordable childcare in her rural area.

Vicki, a 28 year old woman, moved from Australia to Scotland in 2019 to a small town in a rural area to join her partner who worked in a five-star hotel there. In Australia, she had worked as a restaurant manager for several years. On arrival in Scotland, she found it fairly easy to get a job in the same hotel as her partner, working first as a waitress and then as a receptionist. When this hotel was sold, she was made redundant although both she and her partner found similar jobs in another hotel. Shortly afterwards, the pandemic hit and she was furloughed for almost a year. During this time, she also fell pregnant



and gave birth to her daughter. When her daughter was around six months old, she returned to work in the hotel although she was ultimately unable to come to a suitable arrangement on hours with her employer – an experience that she found difficult, as explored below. She left the hotel and found a job as a bartender in a local bar, where she was still working when we interviewed her in May 2022.

Vicki told us that she enjoyed working in the bar: she liked the social interaction with regular customers and also what she described as the “creative” side of her work, particularly writing the cocktail menus and mixing the drinks. At the same time, however, she told us that she was considering leaving the hospitality industry and instead finding an office job, perhaps in Human Resources. Her main concerns about working in hospitality were the hours and particularly the impact on her well-being and family life of working anti-social and often unpredictable hours. She also felt that she was being underpaid and that the work was physically very demanding.

While she had held a full-time contract in the first hotel she worked in, her second hotel job came with a zero-hours contract, meaning that there was

a great variation in the number of hours she worked each week, depending on the needs of the hotel and on her availability. She told us that some weeks she only worked one day a week, while other weeks she would work four or five days a week. She told us that this was manageable only because she could rely on her partner's income:

“It was just like a zero-hour contract and my hours went like, they were really up and down, they just slotted me in whenever I could work, because [my partner] and I worked at the same hotel again. It was very up and down, and they put me on, one week was like four or five days and then one week was one day...[but] we weren't relying on me doing a certain number of hours luckily, we could just rely on [my partner's] wages and then whatever I got was a bonus.”

Vicki had hoped that this zero-hours contract would come with some advantages after her baby was born, not only because this contract seemed to offer flexibility but because the hotel initially agreed to schedule her only when her partner was not working. Vicki told us that this was essential for them, as there was no affordable childcare available in the town where they lived – a town of around 2500 people, centred around the tourist industry. However, working such unpredictable and variable hours made it difficult to plan a social life and to spend time with her partner, as she explained:

“It was hard, because yes, like I said, they sort of like balanced it for both of us, obviously, so that we weren't working at the same time, but then it was like we didn't see each other a lot, it was like passing ships, because if

one was home, the other was working all the time. There wasn't a set routine, so, that was quite hard and it was hard to organise going to see [my partner's] family in Edinburgh, which is a couple of hours drive...So, it was quite difficult and my social life, basically didn't exist, because it was really hard to make plans.”

Moreover, shortly after returning to work from maternity leave, her employer started to request that she work more hours than she was able to. Even though she was on a zero-hours contract, they said they needed someone who could commit to more hours, and who had the flexibility to work whenever they needed, even if these times changed each week. This was impossible for Vicki, given her partner's working hours and her childcare commitments, leaving her with little option but to leave her job. She told us that she found this upsetting, especially as her employer had initially promised her the flexibility she required.

It did not take long for Vicki to find her current job in the local bar. Here she was on a part-time contract, working approximately 20 hours a week on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, typically from around 5pm until closing time. She told us that closing time varies, however, between 10pm and midnight, depending on how busy the bar is. She reported being paid fairly and accurately, by the hour. When asked about how she felt about her current hours, she told us that while she appreciated being able to work when her partner was at home with her daughter, she found working nights difficult, as it was tiring and left her little time for her family:

“I am happy with [my hours but]...it has taken a toll, the only day off my partner and I have together is a Sunday, that’s our only full day off together and then he’s got to work the next morning, so, it is a bit of a struggle with that and also I think finishing so late, I didn’t realise how much it would affect me, because by the time I get home and unwind, it’s sort of like, I might not go to sleep until about two and then [my daughter] is up at six. So, normally [my partner] gets up with her, but I still obviously wake up and then it wastes a bit of the day, you can’t really spend the whole day together, because I’m just a zombie. So, I don’t think I really thought that through before I got back into bar work to be honest. [So yes] definitely, lack of sleep, tiredness and probably like, obviously, family time as well [is what is difficult].”

Vicki is paid £10 per hour in her current job while she had been paid £9.50 in her previous work at the hotels. She did not think these wages were particularly fair, given her experience and training as a manager in Australia. Moreover, in her current job in the bar, she was performing the role of a manager, despite not being paid accordingly:

“When I first got the job, there was someone else that was in charge, who has since left, and that’s why I’ve taken over everything. [It’s] not really what I signed up for at first.... just by default, I’ve ended up running it, I write the menus, I train new staff, I do the cash up, I open and close, and I lock up and everything but I’m not technically, I don’t have the role of a manager.”

She also explained how she found this added responsibility stressful at times,

and that it had restricted her ability to take time off:

“When I was first going, I thought oh well it’s just a job, I can just go, do my job, come home, that’s it, whereas now it’s like a lot of, I’m doing a lot of thinking about work, outside of work, which is not really what I wanted to do. So, I think it has put a bit of stress on me as well, like, I haven’t been able to take certain days off, like on the weekends, because literally, like when we hired someone else, they had hardly any experience. So, I felt like, well I can’t take a day off, I can’t leave this other person, because they don’t even know how to make a cocktail. So, I think that was a big thing.

I [take stuff home] like, the stock, thinking about making sure we’ve got enough stock in and thinking about what needs to be made for the cocktails, because we make syrups and things like that. There have been times where I make them at home, in my own kitchen. Like rosemary syrup for example or sugar syrup or whatever... just making sure that...the right fruit is getting ordered for us, yes, and thinking about if we’ve opened a bottle of wine on the weekend, it’s only going to be good for four days. So, I have to tell the people in the café, if you don’t sell it by Wednesday, or Thursday, take it off the shelf and all things like that. Which, for the first couple of months, I never had to worry about, because there was someone else that was in charge.”

We asked Vicki if she had asked for a pay rise: she replied that she had not because she felt uncomfortable asking the bar owner, with whom she reported having a good relationship – like “good friends”, in Vicki’s words. This woman

was currently experiencing personal difficulties and Vicki did not feel able to ask for a raise.



Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Lizzie

Age: 23

Nationality: British

Residency: Recently moved to an island for work. Previously lived and worked mainly in the north of England.

Work History: Worked in hospitality since leaving school, including in pubs, fast-food restaurants and as a restaurant supervisor in a holiday camp.

Takeaway: Happy with new job on an island resort but sees the job as temporary due to problems associated with its remote location.



working long hours without being paid overtime. In this previous job, they had never managed to have the same day-off in the week, which meant they had little time to spend together. Moreover, as her partner did not drive and the holiday camp had been in a rural location, Lizzie had spent her days off driving her partner to and from work, rather than travelling to see her family and friends.

When they accepted the job on the island resort in Scotland, they stipulated that they wanted to have the same day off, to which management agreed. Lizzie was pleased to be paid by the hour rather than on an annualised salary, as she felt that this would ensure that she was not expected to work unpaid overtime, as had happened in her previous job. Lizzie also told us that she had been pleased with how supportive the restaurant management had been when she experienced sexual harassment from a customer (see section 3.4.2.4). She was aware that the resort was experiencing staff shortages – with several of its restaurants currently closed as a result – and she had already experienced changes to her hours due to these shortages. However, as long as her

When we interviewed Lizzie, she had recently started a new job as a waitress in a restaurant that was part of an island holiday resort. She had moved there with her partner, who had taken a job as a sous-chef in the restaurant kitchen. They had also worked together in their previous job in a holiday camp, where Lizzie had worked in a supervisory position in a restaurant. Both Lizzie and her partner had been born and raised in the north of England, and this was their first job in Scotland.

They had decided to move to Scotland due to their dissatisfaction with their previous job, which had involved

day off with her partner was protected, she did not mind last-minute changes to her shifts.

Despite this positive beginning to her new job, Lizzie saw her job at the resort as temporary, lasting probably just for the summer season and perhaps into the Christmas period. She told us that its remote location was the main reason for this: not only was it far away from her family and friends but it was also hard for them to see a future for themselves there due to a lack of affordable accommodation. They were currently living in a shared room in staff accommodation. She told us that while she was essentially happy with the accommodation, she was still adjusting to the lack of privacy and space:

“I found it a bit weird to adjust, because we would like a bit more privacy, because we’ve lived in our flat for three years, just us two and the dog, so, I think it’s a little bit weird sharing a kitchen and sharing a bathroom, but I’m sure I’ll get used to it.”

Lizzie expressed wishes to settle down and buy a family house within the near

future, but she suspected this would be impossible on the island:

“We’ve had a look [at buying a place] and just on the island, it’s just, it’s abysmal, I thought where we lived was bad, but there’s nothing. Some of the chefs that [my partner’s] been speaking to, have been here for three years and they still can’t get a house.”

In the shorter term, Lizzie also expressed shock at the price of petrol on the island, which she told us was higher than on the mainland. She also described to us how there was less choice about where she shopped and the products that were available:

“Oh my God yes [I’m worried about the cost of living] I mean, because it’s an island, it’s the most expensive, it’s more expensive, like fuel for a litre is two pound thirteen. Now I nearly threw up in my mouth when I saw it, I was like, oh my God. Like the Co-op, I think the Co-op is more expensive here, we had a Co-op where we lived, and I don’t know, just everything is a bit pricier....: Yes, that’s the only choice, I’d kill for a Lidl or a McDonalds, yes, there’s no fast-food restaurants, there’s literally one pizza and a Chinese.”

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Jamie

Age: 38

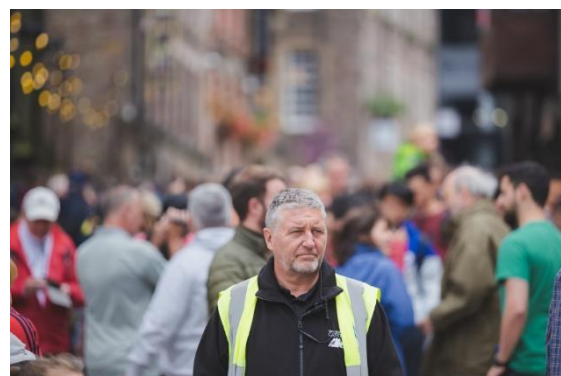
Nationality: UK

Residency: Lives in Glasgow

Work History: Worked as security guard/bouncer for over 15 years

Takeaway: Jamie likes security work but has recently taken a permanent job as an assistant porter in the NHS due to the financial and social difficulties of working anti-social hours and on zero-hours contract in the hospitality sector.

Jamie, a 38-year-old man living in Glasgow, had worked full-time as a security guard for over 15 years, largely in nightclubs, bars, pubs, and music festivals. He used to work for what he described as a “big company” although he now works for a small agency, run by a man with whom he reported having a very good relationship. He has almost always worked on a zero-hours contract but is much happier with this current employer, whom he felt did not exploit the terms of this type of arrangement. Indeed, he emphasised to us how previous companies had threatened to not give him work if he refused to take on hours when offered:



“I've worked for big companies years ago and when you tried to say no they weren't happy with it, even though you're on a zero hours contract... they force your hand....and say well then I'll just not give you any more hours or I won't phone you if anything comes in, so I stopped working for big companies.. now I let my guy know whether I've got something on or I've got my [daughter] and he'll get it covered.”

Moreover, around two years ago, Jamie secured a job on the NHS as an assistant porter. He now works around 25 hours a week on a permanent contract with the NHS, and then approximately two weekends a month doing security. In our interview, he spoke several times about his preference for this arrangement, primarily because of the security provided by the permanent job in the NHS. In particular, he appreciated receiving sick and holiday pay on the NHS, and the fact he was now saving for a pension. He also felt that he was less over-worked than he had been in the past now that he had the security of the monthly income from the NHS. He described to us how he used to work 50-60 hours a week without time off in order to make ends meet, and how he still observes similar forms of

over-work and precarity among co-workers in the industry:

“I’d do retail security and then I’d do the doors at the weekends, so some days it was seven days a week...I did that for a long time. shopping centre hours were like eight hour shifts so that would’ve been forty hours a week, and the doors minimal ten hours at the weekends... [I see now] people that don’t have a permanent job they’re having to work for two and three different companies just to make up their hours...”

Jamie was also grateful that now, due to the NHS job, he did not have to work every weekend, which he had found a challenge due to its impacts on his social life:

“You sometimes get sick of it, you get sick of it every weekend, doing the weekends. [It was good] when I got the job in the NHS and I got to choose I didn’t have to do [the security work] every weekend, I could just do it as and when. I’m starting to enjoy my

weekends more now.....You see, before I got the job with the NHS, I was working every weekend literally, a couple of days during the week and then working every weekend and that’s why I got the NHS job [so] I didn’t have to work [every] weekend.. [because] if you’re doing the door, it’s kind of like. [if you’re] going to the football with your mates because you start your door at seven, they’re all getting drunk and you have to be sober to go to work.”

For all these reasons, Jamie told us that he hoped to pursue further progression in his NHS job and to stop the security work altogether within the next five to ten years. He also told us that while he had greatly enjoyed working in hospitality over the years, he felt that security work was better suited to a younger person, given the often physically- and mentally-demanding nature of the job.

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Timea

Nationality: Hungarian

Age: 48

Work History: Worked in a secondary school in Hungary. In Scotland, has worked for a decade in hospitality, mainly as a chef.

Residency: EU settled status, Currently lived in a hotel's staff accommodation in a rural location

Takeaway: Has experienced a range of difficult experiences in the industry, including: working long hours that were detrimental to her health and family life; illegal work practices; low pay; racism and sexism; workplace injuries due to poor working practices; and living in tied and unsuitable accommodation in rural areas.

Timea moved from Hungary to Scotland in 2012. In Hungary she had been working as a receptionist in a secondary school although, following her divorce from her husband, she decided that her job prospects would be significantly better in the UK than in Hungary. In her words:

“I couldn't see any way to maintain myself and support my children on a Hungarian wage.”

On arrival in Scotland, Timea quickly found a job as a cleaner, working largely in restaurants during the night-time, often finishing at around 4am in the morning. At this point, she spoke



little English and felt that cleaning work was the only option available to her due to her limited language. In her interview with us, she described the work as “really hard” and “really underpaid”, which made her feel “under pressure”. She also shared a room with a fellow cleaner, a Romanian woman, which she found difficult given the lack of space and privacy. This job was on a zero-hours contract, although the majority of her jobs since have been on full-time contracts. After a short period, she moved to a small town in a rural area, taking up a job as a housekeeper in a small hotel, where she also started helping out in the kitchen. This was the start of Timea's work in kitchens, which she has been doing ever since, albeit often alongside other duties.

After 18 months in this hotel, Timea moved to England to work as a commis chef in a gastro pub in Reading, which she enjoyed. She described this experience as the first time that she began to experience a “passion” for cooking. However, still being paid minimum wage, she found herself unable to afford rent in Reading. She returned to Scotland, taking up a job in a hotel in a remote location in north-eastern Scotland. Here she worked as a commis chef, a housekeeper, a waitress, and a receptionist, depending on the day in

question. She described working long hours in this hotel, without much time off. In the summer season in particular, she would work 13 days in a row, for 12 hours a day, before having one day off and starting another 13 days of work. She described some weeks where she was working over 100 hours a week. She said she was paid a fixed salary for this work, which meant that – if broken down by the hour – she was being paid well-under minimum wage.

Tímea then started a new relationship with a man who lived and worked on an island, resulting in her moving and finding a job there. She worked first for a small venue, where she experienced sexual harassment from the head chef. She told us:

“I was working there for three weeks and the actual head chef there he was sexually trying to harass me and because he had my number, because he was the head chef, he started to send inappropriate messages as well and it was... I needed to block him and leave the place.”

After quickly leaving this job, she obtained a job as a chef in a local venue. She worked here for almost two years, leaving only when she realised that her employer was not paying her adequate holiday pay. She told us that, in total, he held back almost £2,000 in holiday pay over the course of her employment. With the help of her next employer, whom she reported as kind and a good friend, she went to ACAS with nine other employees from the golf club and she ended up receiving a settlement of over £1,000.

Tímea described this as a “very bad experience” that damaged her confidence in employers in the industry. She told us that, at first, she thought that this employer had felt at

liberty to exploit her in this manner because she was a “foreigner”. She later changed her view on this when she learned that other employees – who were not migrants – had also not been paid. However, she noted that her employer had originally tried to distract from his actions by trying to convince her that she had misunderstood Scottish law and employment practice. She told us:

“At the beginning he acted like, how can I put this, like I’m stupid because...I’m not from here and I know nothing about how holiday payments work... Thankfully I knew who was the accountant and...she was very nice and kind and she told me everything about how holiday pay works which I already knew but I needed some encouragement.”

It was also during this time that Tímea’s relationship with her partner broke down and she had to move out of her partner’s flat. While he had been born and raised on the island, she found herself unable to find affordable accommodation. In her words, the island “literally lives on tourism and so I wasn’t able to find one single [place to live], not even like a room share, nothing”. For this reason, she decided to return to the hotel where she had previously worked, given that she had a good relationship with the employer. She worked in the kitchen and doing housekeeping again, although this time she also took on a second job doing chef work at a small guesthouse, working three nights a week. She described sentiments of guilt about this job: she said it was “not the right thing to do” and “her only black job in the UK”, as she was paid in cash that she did not declare.

After a period, she began a new relationship with a man and moved to Edinburgh, where she was still based

when we interviewed her. Her first job in the city was in a restaurant that primarily served fried chicken dishes. She was paid a pound above minimum wage, which she described as “already better than any time before”. However, she found the working conditions there physically stressful and ultimately untenable, leading her to hand in her notice after only a week. Despite leaving after a week, she told us that she still struggled with pain in her wrists due to the injuries she incurred during this week:

“They put me on the fryers for four days, for 12 hours, with no break. There were three double fryers and five or six kilo of chicken wings needed to be fried, they were very, very heavy and after four days my wrists were thick as my whole underarm because it was so swollen and I barely could move my fingers and I have struggled with my wrists since... it was without breaks and it was extremely hot but it was kind of in a corner with barely any ventilation and a wall from one corner, a shelf behind me and the fryer’s in front of me, so there was only one way out...It was physically very hard, I couldn’t breathe after a certain time because it was too warm, you didn’t get any fresh air. I didn’t have food.”

Tímea told us that she had had fairly similar experiences with a lack of breaks in her other jobs in the hospitality industry: “I got, kind of, sometimes [got breaks], not every day. But no one ever said to me, okay, you need to go for your break now because you [have been too long] working already”.

Following the chicken restaurant, Tímea took a job as a chef in another gastro pub, where she was paid only in cash. After three weeks, she asked for a proper contract and wage, to which the employer flatly refused. Tímea

explained to us that she was unwilling to accept this, especially as she now had considerable experience of how demanding chef work could be. In her words “I want a pension for my old age. It’s a demanding job, you’re going to get sick after a while, you are not able to stand in the kitchen for 12 hours and [stay well].”

Again, Tímea found it very easy to find another chef job, this time in a hotel an hour’s drive from Edinburgh. She considered herself lucky to have found this job so quickly, as only a few months later the pandemic hit and she was able to receive furlough. However, after around 12 months, the hotel started to downsize due to losses incurred during the pandemic and Tímea was made redundant. Her employer notified her of her redundancy but kept her on furlough for another three months while Tímea looked for another job.

Her next job was also relatively short-lived: she described this job as “13 hours a day, five days a week and the break was, well, either you work it or not, depending on how much preparation you had done”. She described the sous-chef as an alcoholic who regularly did not turn up to work, leaving the place understaffed. Interestingly, she added that, in her observation, drugs and alcohol misuse was a frequent problem among kitchen staff as it’s “the way they cope” with the stress of cheffing. Things came to a head for Tímea when the head chef was on holiday, the sous-chef had failed to turn up to work, and the agency staff hired by the management were not working to a high standard, leading the kitchen to “fall apart”, as Tímea described it. She said the management expected Tímea to manage the whole kitchen almost

alone, which she felt unable to do, leading her to hand in her notice.

This last job was at the beginning of 2022. When we interviewed Tímea in May 2022, she had recently started a new job as a sous chef in a hotel, although she had been promised the opportunity for a promotion to head chef within the year when the existing chef was planning to retire. Her feelings about her current job were relatively mixed: her salary was much better than previous minimum wage jobs and, if she was promoted to head chef, she would receive a salary of £32,000 a year. However, she still worked 65-70 hours a week, which she found physically extremely tiring. While she said that she “still likes cooking”, she wondered how long she would be able to maintain this level of physical exhaustion as she approached her 50th birthday. She told us:

“It’s very demanding and stressful and I already feel...it’s not good for me. It affects my sleep [because] I start as breakfast chef at 6 o’clock in the morning and I finish at 10 o’clock at night time. I’ve put weight on, even though I eat less, because I eat at night-time, and I’m starving and I have to eat. I can’t really exercise because I have five hours to sleep or six hours to sleep at night.”

Moreover, this job was a two-hour drive away from Edinburgh. The journey was too long to do every day so she was living in a staff accommodation in the hotel. However, this was a single room, meaning that her son – who was now 18 and lived in Scotland – could not spend his university holidays with her. It also meant that she lived away from her partner. However, she reported that local accommodation was not an option, as it was a relatively remote,

tourist location where accommodation was expensive and in short supply.

Finally, Tímea also told us that she had experienced “racism [and] sexism very often” in the hospitality industry. She gave the example of a former boss who was unable to remember her name properly and so chose instead to call her “Friday” after a famous slave character from the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. She also said that this same employer “made jokes at our expense” if she or her colleagues made errors in their spoken or written English. Indeed, she felt that she had often experienced discrimination based on her accent or language capacity: in her words, “people kind of think you are stupid”. She also felt that kitchens were often sexist places, as she described: “they’re male operated, they really are: if you are a woman and work in a kitchen, they’d really make you feel like you are less than the men in many places. I needed to fight a lot of times because of that.”

For all these reasons, Tímea felt concerned about carrying on working in the hospitality industry. However, she felt that with her experience and continued progression over the years, it was the best option for her financially. She had considered working in an office, or in retail, but believed that it was unlikely she could get a job at a similar wage.

Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Mike

Age: 44

Nationality: Scottish

Work History: Hotel manager

Takeaway: After several decades as a manager in hotels, Mike experienced depression and burnout due to working long hours and the pressure of managerial responsibilities. He currently works on a zero-hours contract as a bartender while considering whether to return to managerial work.

Mike, a 44-year-old man, has worked in hospitality for two decades, primarily as a manager in restaurants and hotels. He recently gave up this managerial work, however, following an episode of burn-out and depression – something that he linked, among other things, to the stress he had experienced in the hospitality industry. He was currently working on zero-hours contracts as a bartender in a pub and in a local golf club near Dundee while he decided whether to return to managerial roles.

Mike's longest stretch of employment had been as a manager in a luxury hotel in the Highlands, where he had worked for over ten years, primarily running events within the hotel. He described to us how this involved long



hours, which did not involve being paid overtime. He saw these hours partly as a product of being in a managerial role, and partly as the result of doing a job that revolved around the needs of the customer:

“I very rarely worked almost anywhere less than 55 hours a week in a management or a supervisory role.... working in [management] you're heavily reliant on your teams, and if your teams aren't performing or don't turn up or sickness, ultimately the buck stops with you, and it's your responsibility, and there's an expectation on you to be able to do that.

There were weeks where I was doing over 70, over 80 hours and consecutively in those, I think there was one week I did over 80 hours, two weeks in a row, at [the hotel]. The other thing about doing the events side of the business, is that because they're all hotel residents generally, it is their house, so, technically is there an end time? So, I would keep my event going, so that the guests were looked after and had the best time. Then of course, the longer the night goes on, the less staff I have to do the close down and the tidy up. So, it elongates everything more, because some of my staff are maybe working breakfast in the morning or have been working since 12 o'clock in the afternoon. So, that in itself, becomes a challenge,

because you try to look after people to the best of your ability, [but] it has a double knock-on effect on you.”

Mike also described how he had always worked different hours each week, making it very hard for him to make social plans:

“[The rota] changed every week, because the business changed every week... because as soon as you’ve got a request in the diary for someone or somebody off on holiday, then the rota changes..[and] if you’re in the hotel environment and you have events on and corporate dos and things, because bearing in mind, corporate dos would be mid-week [but then] weddings and private events more at the weekend, but then you don’t have corporate dos over the summer holidays. Corporate stuff finishes over the summer and it’s more leisure things. So, you’re adapting to what the requirements and the expectations of the business are, all the time, your rota was never ever the same, one week to the next, never .[It affects your social life] hugely, because you can never, you can’t plan, I wouldn’t know if I was working on a Sunday until Thursday afternoon.”

Mike described to us how he left this hotel eventually after a disagreement with his employer about his long hours – a dispute that he described as a precipitating factor in the deterioration of his mental health. The dispute had centred around the hotel’s promise to provide people with ‘time off in lieu’ when they worked extra days beyond their contract. Given that he frequently worked a six-day week but was contracted for five days, Mike calculated that he was due 15 days back from his employer. He described to us what happened when he raised this with his employer:

“So then I raised it to the line manager, I was then told really there wasn’t much we could do, I said, ‘Look, I just want my time back’. ‘Well we don’t have the staff to give you the time back.’ I said, ‘Well try and pay me for it then.’ Then...there was a big discussion, I ended up going up to director level, director of food and beverage, the director of HR and I ended up in a meeting with them about it. I said, ‘Look, I understand we don’t have enough staff, I understand how busy we are,’ because you see the weekly and monthly figures coming through, so, you know where you are in terms of your budget, you know where you are in terms of your headcount. I said, ‘I give everything I can’ I said, ‘But I do want to be treated fairly.’.. But it was made clear that there was no way the business could sustain me getting 15 days back.”

Mike described how eventually the hotel agreed to pay him for the extra 15 days, although Mike felt that the dispute resulted in him being “blacklisted” within the hotel, hampering any further progression. He also noted that the hotel promised to give him days back in the future, if he claimed them within the month, although this never happened:

“They were quite aggressive and I would say a wee bit bullying towards it. They agreed to pay me my 15 days, I was then told that the discussion and the outcome of the discussion does not leave the room, because they know they were doing the wrong thing.”

“I’m the only person that is putting my head above the parapet, and ultimately, I got paid my 15 days, [and] I was told that if I worked an extra day I had to get that extra day back, within the month. That never happened either, because they didn’t have the availability of staff to be able to do that.

It certainly hampered any further progression for me at the hotel, because that was me sort of blacklisted, in terms of any forward movement, there was no way I was moving forward after that, because I wasn't a yes man. So, ultimately, after a wee while, I then decided to seek other opportunities. [I said] I wanted a bit of time off, and to look at other things, but I was actually suffering from depression."

It is worth noting that Mike saw some of the problems that he had experienced as specific to the prestigious and therefore high-pressure nature of this hotel, as opposed to a problem that applied to the entire hospitality industry in general. For example, he told us:

"I must point out that I ran a local hotel, ten bedrooms, busy restaurant, whiskey bar for six years, and I had consistency in my life, I was off every Sunday, every Wednesday and I was able to...recruit and build the right team, but again, I was looking to challenge myself, and so we took the business to a good level, but I then wanted a fresh challenge, as people do. On hindsight, would I rather I was still there? Perhaps, but you move on."

Mike now worked on a zero-hours contracts in a local pub and in a local golf club, which he stated had the advantage of allowing him to control his time, have a better social life, and not to work unpaid overtime:

"I think my work life balance is better now, for example, if I'm in the pub, and my shift is meant to finish at nine o'clock or ten o'clock and then my shift finishes at that time, I go home. I can arrange to meet people after work, I can arrange to you know, do something before, without the feeling that I might get called in because they're short staffed or too busy. If I do

like, let's say for example, I'm meant to finish at ten, and they say, Mike, it's really busy, is there any chance you could stay on for half an hour or an hour? I have the ability now to say yes or no, that I never had before. So, yes, I'm getting paid less money, but I'm in more control of my own life. I'm in a position where I'm not married, no kids or anything, so, the financial expectation or burden on me, is not as great as it is for other people. So, I don't necessarily need as much money as I needed before, that people at my age, might need. So, I have that ability but I suppose, part of the reason that I've not found that family life, is largely work related as well."

Mike noted how he was frequently offered managerial jobs by former colleagues and contacts, although he was hesitant to take anything on, because of his negative experiences in the past:

"I'm very careful and protective of what I do. I get phone calls probably once every couple of weeks, wanting, asking me to come and speak about certain roles and positions, and I'm like, no. Recently, I got approached from a local hotel and asked me if I would go in, on about fifty percent more money than generally I'm on between the two places [currently], I'm

like, no, because I know what comes with it. Despite even, despite what they say on the cover, I know the reality will be very different. So, I'm not prepared

at the moment, to put myself back in that position.”



Workers' Experience of the Hospitality Sector

Worker Profile

Name: Benci

Age: 52

Nationality: Hungarian

Residency: Moved from Hungary 6 years ago, now lives in a small town in Scotland with his wife and two children.

Work History: Graphic designer in Hungary. After arriving in Scotland, he started working in a factory. Now he trains and works as a chef.

Takeaway: Happy with job and excited about prospects for progression, but long hours affect his mental health and the time he spends with his kids.

Benci moved to Scotland from Hungary with his wife and two children almost six years ago. He described the move as motivated by a search for “better opportunities” for himself and his family. He had worked as a graphic designer in Hungary although on arrival in Scotland he obtained work in a factory as a manual labourer – work that he did for around four years. He did not enjoy this work, however, in large part because he experienced discrimination from other colleagues for being a “foreigner”, as he described to us:

“I wasn’t fitting in well at the factory, because of my language and my identity...because I’m a foreigner, the people are, don’t want to, didn’t want to accept this situation, and I was abused, bullied



a little bit...I think because there was a lot of uneducated people, and they just talking what they’re hearing....I was a little bit over educated, and they were, I don’t know, maybe just jealous or maybe, I don’t know, I don’t care.”

Over a year ago, knowing of his struggles in the factory, a Hungarian friend suggested he take a job as a commis-chef in a restaurant in a hotel in the Highlands – around 60 mins drive away from the small town where he lived in south-west Scotland. Since then, Benci has developed a passion for cooking and is currently pursuing his ambition to work as a head chef in a fine-dining restaurant – work that he described as creative, skilful and challenging. After a few months of working at this hotel, he enrolled and completed a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) course in cookery at a local higher education college. At the time of interviewing, he had completed Level 5 and was pursuing Level 6. He described the decision to study as his own choice, rather than a necessity in the business:

“It was my idea, because what I usually do, I’d like to do academically, so, I need to learn not just from the other people, so, I’d like to do this academically.”

Benci also decided that he would benefit from working in a kitchen that was more focused on fine-dining, and so he applied for and obtained a job as

a trainee chef in a fine-dining restaurant in a local market town, around a 45 minute drive away. He is paid £9.50 in this kitchen and works 30 hours a week, primarily in the evenings and weekends in order to fit around his ongoing studies. He described the kitchen as a “professional kitchen” which always paid fairly and accurately, and which did not experience staff shortages, meaning he was never asked to work beyond his contracted hours.

Reflecting on his pay, Benci commented that he was content with his level of pay because he saw the training that he was receiving at the restaurant as invaluable for his progression prospects.

Interestingly, Benci described his training both in his first job at the hotel, and in his current job at the restaurant, as an informal training programme that centred around a good working relationship with his more senior colleagues. He described working in the hotel as follows:

“I was anxious, excited, but full of joy and hope and I was lucky, because [the chef], she [gave] me everything, at the beginning, how could I do things better? Faster? Tastier?... everything what I learnt...was from her...she [mentored] me... and after I started my studies, at the college, I just improved my knowledge.”

He described similar positive relationships with the head chef and sous chef at his current restaurant, whom he praised for the time they took to set him new challenges and to answer his questions. Again, he described training as a process of observing, being set new challenges, and asking questions:

“My sous chef, he is educated, he came from Italy and he has got skills, explaining the things, make the things in a good way and he is training me.

The head chef, he wasn't educated, but he has got a lot of experience, he's so professional and he hasn't got too much skill to explain things, but he can show me...So, one of them speaking, another one moving, so... All the time, they told me there is no stupid questions, all the time you question, make the questions, ask everything. If I think it's a stupid question, it doesn't matter.”

Benci also emphasised how success in training is a two-way relationship, as it's dependent not only on the approach of the senior chef but also on the will and ambition of the trainee chef:

“But it's up to the person, so, if someone doesn't want to learn, why should I waste my time, because my time is so precious, and for once for example, still doesn't want to improve, increase their knowledge, why should I help anymore. So, it's about a deal between two people I think.”

When asked, Benci told us that he had heard plenty of stories of abusive relationships in kitchens, and chefs that bully their workers. He said that, by contrast, he had found both the kitchens that he worked in to be tight-knit “family” environments that were very supportive. He said he had never experienced in the kitchen the sort of discrimination that he had in his factory work. At the same time, elsewhere in our interview, he also recounted a few instances of being shouted at or treated badly by his head chef. For example, when asked what he thought could improve in the hospitality industry, he replied that he thought people need to learn more patience:

“Yes, patience, I tell you this because in the hotel, it wasn't all the time, from my boss, she wasn't, how can I say? So, she shouted at me once, and I just discussed with her, I don't like this

behaviour and because she hasn't patience, you know."

He also described his first few weeks in his new restaurant, where he felt that his two senior chefs were "testing him" by putting him under pressure:

"I think it was my first month, I was thinking, I'm going to leave this kitchen, because both of my chefs are shouting at me, for example...you need to learn more, faster, you need to do this, if I show you once, twice, you need to do it now! Or I was a little bit anxious and...I had to take five in the fresh air, because I had to make myself better... This happened at service, during the service, and my head chef just shouted at me...concentrate on the service, blah, blah, blah. I came home, and I told my wife, 'it's not working for me' and I just think about the things and processed everything, and I thought I'm going to give it one more shot, one new shot, and I go to the kitchen and do my job and things changed...It was kind of a test, how could I feel myself, under the pressure, what am I doing when I'm in the pressure, under the pressure? So, nothing, so, it never happened again.... I understand now it's because they don't want to teach to someone who [does not] want to learn. They don't shout at me anymore."

Benci told us that, following this incident, he realised that he cannot take breaks during the service, and that, therefore, he has to find a way to manage the anxiety he experiences when under pressure to deliver dishes on time and to high quality. He told us that he asked for advice from his sous-chef on this issue recently:

"That was my question yesterday, how could I manage my stress better at the workplace? So when I'm getting stressed and frustrated, what can I do? And he told me a couple of tricks [that] could make me calm. So, yes he's a

very good guy....So, concentrate just on one thing at a time, not so, everybody says working in the kitchen is multitasking, but if I have got five or six orders, so, just concentrate on one at a time, and the second and third, and keep on. So, and I will see the stress is getting less, the frustration is getting less and my brain just growing and growing, and just do things, like easily."

Benci told us that he has plans to continue his studies by completing Level 7 of the SVQ course, which will involve his head chef sponsoring him on a work placement – something that this chef has not done before but is happy to do for Benci. Benci also has hopes to study for an undergraduate degree in Culinary Arts in Edinburgh. He hopes that his chef will allow him to reduce his hours but stay on at the kitchen while he completes these studies, although he has not broached this subject with him yet.

While Benci reported being very happy with his job and excited by his prospects for progression and further training, he did note that his long hours had affected his mental health, as well as the amount of time he had to spend with his children.

"My mental health it's a little bit less, because I couldn't sleep well [because] I arrive home late at night, and I need to wake up early... [I finish, the drive is 45 mins] then I go to bed sometimes, it's midnight or half twelve. [In the morning] I need to go to the school and I need to take my kids to school [and then be in college] from nine to half four....

I try to, spend my time with my kids, if I can and make them precious times. But it's not enough, not enough, so, and I can see it's affecting them...their emotional feeling.



FAIR WORK CONVENTION



© Crown copyright 2023



www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-license

ISBN: 978-1-80525-322-8

This document is also available on our website
www.fairworkconvention.scot

Published on behalf of the Fair Work Convention by APS Group, January 2023
PPDAS1207622 (01/23)