



Hospitality and Tourism Skills Network - Strategic Action Plan

Progress & impact – September 2024



Foreword

The HATS Network is committed to working closely with employers, education, government and delivery partners to transform perceptions of the hospitality and tourism industry and to attract, retain and develop talented people with the skills it needs both now and in the future.

In June 2023, as an employer-led collaboration funded by Tourism Northern Ireland, Invest Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Hotels Federation and facilitated by People 1st International, we developed a skills action plan for the hospitality and tourism industry to tackle attraction and retention challenges. Thanks to our shared commitment, collaborative action has led to significant progress in achieving our goals.

Our efforts have focused on several strategic objectives aimed at enhancing workforce development in the sector through effective partnership working. Particular highlights include

engagement with stakeholders to influence government policies and strategies in partnership with Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) and presenting sector insights and workforce priorities to the Northern Ireland Skills Council. Our skills need research has provided a comprehensive picture of the new and emerging skills and workforce challenges facing the industry, and our partnerships with multiple careers influencers have enabled us to profile the sector and its opportunities.

We are committed to maximising on this momentum with our industry partners. Our continued focus is on creating a highly skilled and inclusive workforce that will serve as the driving force behind our industry.

Our objectives

ATTRACT



Improve the awareness and attractiveness of the hospitality & tourism sector & the range of career opportunities

RETAIN



Raise employer awareness of available skills support and increase retention of people working in the industry

ENGAGE



Support collaborative delivery of skills and careers strategies and activities across key stakeholders aligned to employer demand

Update on the key objectives of the action plan

Attract: Improve the awareness and attractiveness of the hospitality and tourism sector & the range of opportunities



Improving perceptions

We proudly supported the Make it Here awareness campaign, led by TNI, in its launch and profiling on HATS comms channels to amplify its messaging with employer testimonies and spotlighting good practice.

Input provided to support project planning, digital platform content development and wider stakeholder engagement.



Improving skills needs planning

Our State of the Workforce 2023 Survey was released to shed light on some of the deep-rooted staffing issues impacting upon the sector, leading to calls for greater investment in employee retention and development.

With input from over 75 employers, the research covered skills gaps & shortages, recruitment & retention and training & development. It also highlighted employer best practices in tackling recruitment and retention to inform wider industry activities.



Building knowledge of key influencers to improve careers advice

We participated in the NI Schools and Careers Teachers Association Spring Conference, delivered Sector Insight webinars with Women Breaking Barriers and the NI Union of Supported Employment, securing industry contributions from key partners to profile opportunities and how the sector is adapting to meet the needs of jobseekers.



Better connect employers with economically inactive labour pools

Our engagement with Labour Market Partnerships has aligned employment actions plans with sector needs. Our partnership with Women Breaking Barriers has created a bespoke employability programme to support economically inactive women in entering the sector, and we have collaborated with the NI Union of Supported Employment to support disability-inclusive employment.



Sharing attraction best practices with SME's

We prepared best practice case studies from employers on attraction practices for industry dissemination and issued a call for disability-inclusive practice profiles.

Plans include sharing these at an employer event with NIUSE in the autumn, with partner funding for the event being explored.



Collaborative sector presence at School Summit NI

A collaborative sector presence was delivered at the School Summit NI event in October 2023, showcasing industry opportunities and inspiring post-primary students to consider careers in hospitality and tourism. The event featured interactive demos, a keynote panel with young professionals, and participation from major industry employers, supported by Tourism NI sponsorship.



Improving understanding of career pathways

We engaged with DE/DfE 14-19 team to understand opportunities to input into a new careers portal. As this is still in the early development stage, HATS is providing interim input to the NI Careers Service's refresh of Occupational Bulletins for hospitality and tourism in Autumn 2024.



Improving work experience access and practices

A schools engagement paper has been prepared to outline the available range of activities to help sector businesses connect with students to provide access to work experience. The paper will inform potential collaborations and aims to enhance future sector engagement in work-experience initiatives.

Retain: Raise employer awareness of available skills support, promote good working practices and increase retention of people working in the industry



Improving awareness of funded skills supply

Our Skills Funding and Employer Recruitment Guides have been updated to profile available skills support. These resources have been promoted to the industry through ongoing communications and inclusion on the Tourism NI Recruit and Retain People Hub.



Ensuring education and skills provision is aligned to industry need

We have developed a skills delivery plan proposal with education partners, focusing on workforce upskilling, employment academies, and apprenticeships. Engagement with DfE underway to understand funding support for 2024/25.



Sharing retention best practices with SME's

We presented at IFEX panel on industry skills, in conjunction with NIHF. Retention best practices from HATS Network members have been developed into case studies for dissemination to industry.



Improving workplace attractiveness

We collaborated with Hospitality Ulster and Tourism NI to launch the Wellbeing & Development Promise. Resources from HATS Network and partners were integrated to support implementation.



Encouraging employer investment in apprenticeships

Our new Employer Guide to Apprenticeships was published during NI Apprenticeship Week to encourage employer investment in apprenticeships. The publication provides guidance on how to get started with apprenticeships, alongside as useful tips on how to maximise their value and impact.

Engage: Build strong relationships with industry and key delivery partners to leverage their resources aligned to employer demand for skills



Improving governance of the HATS Network

The HATS Network Executive Steering Group has expanded to include representatives for further education and higher education to inform and support the workplan to build collaborative relationships between education and industry.



Effective influence on government policies and strategies

The skills policy paper and recommendations we developed in partnership with NITA is helping to raise the visibility and voice of sector skills with government and influence immediate and longer-term skills solutions. We profiled sector priorities with the NI Skills Council and have joined the Tourism Partnership Board, established by Economy Minister Conor Murphy to integrate a skills perspective to the board's work.



Engaging with stakeholders to expand HATS awareness

We have strengthened established relationships and developed new partnerships with key stakeholders in the tourism skills ecosystem. These collaborations have enhanced mutual understanding of priorities, enabling us to deliver solutions and leverage resources for HATS Network objectives through periodic briefings, funding proposals, and policy papers.



Enhancing member engagement to invest in skills

A series of engagement meetings with our members has helped ensure alignment with employer needs, supported input into partners' policies and strategies and informed priorities of our future work programme.

Through our proactive communications, we have successfully kept members updated and informed workforce development priorities.



To find out more about HATS Network and sign up for updates visit hatsnetwork.co.uk

HATS Network is funded by Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation and facilitated by People 1st International.