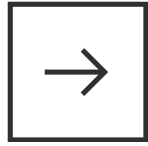# Inclusive workplace toolkit for hospitality and tourism employers

Strategies for attracting, retaining, and advancing women in the industry
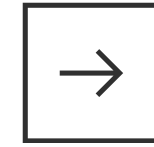
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WOMEN BREAKING BARRIERS

hats
HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SKILLS

People 1st International

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"Creating and managing a diverse workforce is a process, not a destination."

R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.

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In this guide

Introduction

In any business fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace is essential for success. Attracting and retaining top talent, including women, is key to driving innovation and maintaining a competitive edge. However, many businesses still face challenges in fully supporting women's participation and progression.

This toolkit is designed to help employers create a more inclusive environment, providing practical strategies to attract, retain, and support the progression of women in your business. By implementing these recommendations, you'll not only enhance your workplace culture but also strengthen your business.

Explore the toolkit to discover actionable steps and resources for building a more equitable and supportive workplace.

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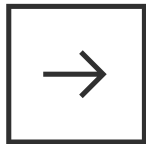
Understanding inclusivity

Being inclusive means creating a workplace where diverse perspectives are welcomed, equitable opportunities are provided and barriers to progression are actively removed. This not only helps in attracting a broader talent pool but also ensures that women can thrive and advance in their careers, ultimately contributing to a more innovative and competitive business.

In most regions of the world, women make up the majority of the tourism workforce yet tend to be concentrated in the lowest paid and lowest status jobs.

Source: unwto.org/gender-and-tourism

Challenges and opportunities for women in the industry

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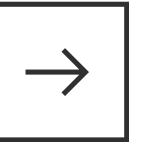
Leadership & progression barriers

Challenge: Despite women making up 54% of the workforce in the hospitality and tourism industry globally, they are underrepresented in executive roles at only 23%.

Opportunity: The current emphasis on diversity and inclusion offers an opportunity for businesses to encourage women to take part in leadership development and mentorship programmes, fostering a more inclusive and innovative workplace.

Sources:
unwto.org/gender-and-tourism
World Tourism Organization, 2019

Perceived work-life balance issues

Challenge: The sector is viewed as having demanding schedules, including long hours and weekend work, which are perceived as making work-life balance particularly challenging for women with caregiving responsibilities.

Opportunity: The flexible working options available in the industry offer an opportunity to showcase the diverse career paths and benefits to women. Flexible hours, part-time opportunities, and supportive parental leave policies can enhance job appeal and retention among women.

Wage gap

Challenge: Despite efforts to address it, the gender pay gap remains a significant issue in the industry in the UK. The Gender Pay Gap Report 2023 showed that the gap increased by 2% to 22.4% in travel over the last year, and by 1% in hospitality to 5.2%.

Opportunity: Companies can use this as an opportunity to interrogate the underlying drivers of pay gaps and review and adjust pay structures, ensuring fair reward and recognition, boosting employee morale and retention.

Sexual harassment concerns

Challenge: While sexual harassment can happen in any workplace, there are factors specific to the industry that increase workers' exposure, with 9 out of 10 workers saying they have experienced abuse according to a study by Unite.

Opportunity: UKHospitality has published a hospitality-focused checklist to help employers prevent sexual harassment at work. This checklist and action plan identifies sector-specific scenarios where harassment may occur, such as power imbalances and lone working, and offers practical preventative measures.
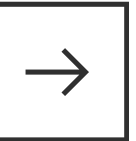
Gender bias and stereotyping

Challenge: Gender bias and stereotypes can impact hiring practices, job assignments, and promotions, affecting women's career growth in the industry.

Opportunity: Promoting awareness of unconscious bias through regular training for all staff and implementing unbiased recruitment and promotion practices can address these issues.

Women's health and wellbeing

Challenge: Irregular and demanding work hours can make it challenging for women to manage menstruation-related symptoms and menopause. Dealing with the fast-paced environment and conflict with customers can also have an impact on wellbeing.

Opportunity: Companies can support employees with policies and practices that prioritise mental health and wellbeing. This includes offering mental health days, menopause policies and providing access to mental health services to support issues such as domestic abuse.

Difficulty combining work with caregiving

Challenge: One of the top barriers to women's advancement to senior roles is the difficulty combining work with caring responsibilities. Some employers have perceived concerns about promoting women with caregiving responsibilities due to doubts about their availability and commitment.

Opportunity:
Implementing flexible work arrangements and support programmes can significantly aid employees in managing caregiving duties alongside their work, while also giving employers access to top talent.
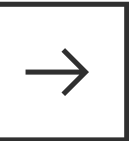
Attraction: Strategies to draw women into the industry

- **Inclusive branding:** Ensure that promotional materials and branding reflect diversity and inclusivity, making the industry more appealing to women.
- **Promote fair pay and comprehensive benefits:** Ensure that compensation is equitable and competitive, with clear structures for salary progression. Offer benefits that support overall well-being, including healthcare, parental leave, and childcare support.
- **Promote work-life balance:** Highlight the flexible hours, part-time opportunities to accommodate personal commitments and family responsibilities and any hybrid opportunities in management positions.
- **Demonstrate progression opportunities:** Showcase the full breadth of varied and exciting roles on offer and highlight clear progression pathways,
- **Highlight success stories:** Promote female role models within the industry through mentorship programmes and highlight successful women leaders.
- **Local involvement:** Engage with Women's Centres and networks that empower women to create a positive image of the sector and promote employment opportunities.

Case study: Air Coach

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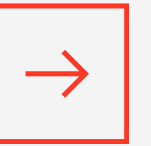
Air Coach aims to increase its female workforce from 9% to 15% by the end of the fiscal year, as part of a broader gender diversity initiative with parent company, First Bus Group. Their strategy includes implementing a 10-point plan with diverse hiring practices, enhanced female representation in branding, and active participation in diversity-focused events.

Air Coach's '**Months of Inclusion' campaign** is a key initiative designed to attract female colleagues by showcasing positive career stories from within the company. To amplify the campaign, Air Coach maximises on national events such as National Inclusion Week, International Women's Day, and Pride.

The business actively participates in **outreach events** and school visits to enhance female representation in its workforce, with female representatives playing a key role in inspiring potential candidates. **Inclusive employer branding** also ensures that female representation is prominent in all internal and external communications.

Air Coach has implemented **flexible work options**, including maternity leave, shared parental leave, flexible work arrangements and a new menopause policy. Additionally, they have introduced a **Period Positive Workplace** initiative, which provides free period products in gender-neutral and disabled toilets.

For **career development**, Air Coach offers programmes such as "Step Up," designed to prepare women for supervisory and management roles by building their capabilities and confidence, and "Step Forward" which accelerates women's progression from leadership to senior leadership roles. Leadership Connection Days are run internally to facilitate connections between women and the company's leadership.

Air Coach has also formed **partnerships** to support its diversity goals, including corporate sponsorship of Women in Transport, aimed at advancing women into senior leadership positions.

Recruitment: Adopting inclusive practices

- **Set goals for female representation in your recruitment strategy:** Plan realistic targets for where you want to increase female representation in the workforce.
- **Job description and adverts**: Use gender neutral language and avoid biased language. Be clear about essential skills and qualifications, but avoid including overly rigid criteria that may discourage women from applying.
- **Application & selection:** Anonymise applications and reduce bias through automated sifting. Promote your approach to diversity and equality throughout. Make sure people responsible for recruiting women focus on potential as well as experience.

- **Recruitment experience**: Be flexible with recruitment timings to accommodate diverse schedules and personal commitments.
- **Implement structured interviews to reduce bias:** This approach entails asking all candidates a predetermined set of questions in the same sequence and scoring their responses based on consistent, predefined criteria for each question.
- **Make decisions about candidates in batches:** This helps to ensure a fair and consistent evaluation process, allowing for more balanced comparisons and reducing the influence of individual biases.

Retention: Keeping women in the workplace

- **Flexible working:** Create a flexible working environment for employees with essential responsibilities, such as childcare or caregiving. This could include offering flexible shifts, adjusting hours, and establishing procedures for emergencies like child illness.
- **Provide tailored benefits:** Offer benefits such as access to childcare support and extended parental leave.
- **Female role models:** Promote senior female role models within your organization or sector, showcasing diverse styles and experiences. Highlight examples of women and men in senior roles who work flexibly to inspire others.
- **Development & succession planning:** Actively support and encourage women in your talent pipeline by offering clear career paths and learning and development opportunities as part of your succession planning.
- **Women returners:** Develop a supportive culture for women returning from maternity leave. Introduce a "returnship" programme that offers phased returns, flexible schedules, training, and personalised career coaching to help ease their transition back to work.
- **Support women's health**: Provide period and menopause support through flexible policies. For instance, allow women experiencing severe symptoms to work from home or adjust their hours, and where feasible, offer access to a dedicated menopause room. Become a period positive workplace by by providing period products.
- **Prioritise safety:** Implement comprehensive measures to protect female staff from harassment and abuse, embedding these practices through clear policies, regular training and ongoing discussions. Embed safe transport policies for employees to address the risks of commuting, particularly late at night.

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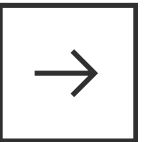
Case study: Titanic Belfast
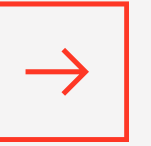
Titanic Belfast has implemented a range of strategies to promote gender balance, inclusion and equal opportunities, resulting in a workforce that is approximately 60% female and 40% male. The visitor attraction's senior leadership team is largely female, which has fostered a culture of awareness around gender-related challenges and inclusion in the workplace.

Rather than focusing on gender-specific strategies, Titanic Belfast focuses on retaining employees from diverse backgrounds. They support employee retention through their **flexible working mechanisms** which encourage line managers to work individually with employees to accommodate their specific needs. For example, an employee returning from maternity leave has been offered a phased return, allowing her to balance caregiving responsibilities with her job. Another employee with complex care duties is able to split her workday between home and the office, offering the flexibility she needs to manage both personal and professional commitments.

The company also places a strong emphasis on development opportunities, **tailoring career progression** plans to each employee's skills, potential and aspirations. Internal mentorship, shadowing, and project-based experiences are offered alongside formal training. The **presence of female leaders** in senior roles sets a powerful example, inspiring confidence among female employees and reinforcing the organisation's commitment to gender equality.

Employee feedback mechanisms are equally important to Titanic Belfast's inclusive culture. Feedback can be personalised based on individual preferences, with regular, shorter sessions encouraged. Some employees prefer traditional face-to-face meetings, while others opt for more informal walk-and-talk discussions.

In addition to internal initiatives, Titanic Belfast uses external tools such as Great Places to Work to **evaluate workplace culture and employee satisfaction**. Employees can volunteer to participate in forums focused on enhancing specific areas, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.
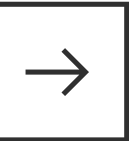
Progression: Supporting career development for women

- **Clear career paths:** Clearly outlining career paths and progression opportunities within the business helps women understand the steps needed to progress. This transparency also ensures that all employees have equal access to career development options..

- **Training and development:** Offering tailored training and development programmes that focus on skill enhancement, leadership and career progression help women build the necessary knowledge and competencies for higher-level roles.

- **Mentorship and sponsorship programmes:** Establishing mentorship programmes that pair high-potential female employees with experienced leaders to guide and support women can significantly boost their career growth. Sponsors play a crucial role by actively promoting their protégés for progression.

- **Networking opportunities:** Facilitating attendance at networking events and professional groups specifically for women can help build valuable connections and open doors to new opportunities. These events also provide a platform for sharing experiences and strategies.

- **Leadership training:** Providing leadership development programmes designed to prepare women for managerial and leadership roles is crucial. These programmes should focus on building confidence, strategic thinking and decision-making skills.

- **Feedback and performance reviews:** Regular, constructive feedback and performance reviews help women understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback should be actionable and aimed at helping them achieve their career goals.

Case study: Andras House
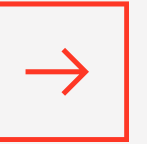
Andras House prides itself on being an equal opportunities employer. Although there is no gender-specific strategy, their training and development programmes have effectively empowered women in their careers. Their dedication to inclusivity has helped build a diverse and well-balanced workforce.

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"Part time workers especially women in mostly male dominated departments are often less likely to get promotions. However at Andras House the continuous support I have received from Management and the entire team has been incredible.

The flexible work schedule, recognition for my contributions and the continued development opportunities have been a great motivator to not let part time working prevent me from achieving my goals." -
Natasha Doherty, Estates Manager

The hotel group's inclusive workforce training initiatives begin with a thorough induction and onboarding process. New recruits participate in a detailed induction that includes **diversity training** and an introduction to the company's **gender-balanced leadership team**, which is 50% female. This early exposure ensures that from day one, employees are immersed in a workplace that prioritises equality and inclusivity.

Andras House provides mandatory **unconscious bias training** through its diversity, inclusion, and equity programme and recruitment staff receive specialised training to ensure hiring is based solely on merit. The company reinforces respect for differences and cultures through regular meetings and communications.

Management and **leadership development** is another area of focus. Training programmes are available for supervisors and heads of departments, with 61% of recent attendees being female. Additionally, a quarterly training programme for aspiring employees is in development, featuring flexible sessions to accommodate various work patterns.

The company places a strong emphasis on health and well-being, including **menopause awareness training**. **Open forums with GPs** are hosted to address health issues, including those specific to gender. A proactive approach is taken to **sexual harassment training**, with clear guidelines on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Employees receive regular briefings and attend dedicated training sessions. Managers reinforce these policies daily during shift meetings to ensure they are integrated into the workplace culture. The hotel group also provides **flexible working options** for all employees and many women returning from maternity leave benefit from these arrangements.
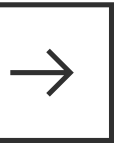
Practical steps to introduce initiatives to support women in the workplace

Many employers quickly introduce gender programmes but face backlash, either from men who feel disadvantaged or from women who don't want to seem like they got a position just because of their gender. To avoid this, careful planning and communication are key. Laying the groundwork before introducing initiatives to address underrepresentation of women will boost your chances of success. Ensuring equal opportunities to professional growth for everyone is crucial to mitigate concerns.

Here's a checklist for effective interventions:

1. Build a business case to:
- make the case for the retention and advancement of women
- explain the approach you'll take to address gender issues. Focus on business goals, strategy (e.g., market growth, talent retention) and collect gender data.

2. Audit your organisation: Identify opportunities and barriers for women by reviewing your culture, policies and practices to choose the right intervention.

3. Gain senior leadership support: Ensure visible buy-in from top-level executives.

4. Communicate clearly: Develop a communication strategy so everyone understands the goals and reasons behind the initiatives.

5. Evaluate effectively: Implement a strong evaluation process to measure success.

TIP: Creating a formal action plan will help ensure your initiative is delivered successfully.

Support & resources

- ACAS: Steps on how to make your workplace inclusive
- Eliminating Sexual Harassment from the Modern Workplace: Guidance for employers, trade unions and employees from the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) and Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Gender equality at work resources from CIPD: Includes resources to promote equal opportunities and manage equality, diversity and inclusion in your organisation.
- How to calculate your gender pay gap from Gov.uk: Calculations to work out your gender pay gap.
- Northern Ireland Childcare Support Scheme (NICSS): An intervention designed to reduce the childcare costs of eligible working parents by 15% for all qualifying children.
- Women Breaking Barriers NI: Collaborative with connections to multiple Women's Centres and network organisations across Northern Ireland
- Women in Business NI: A network for women in the workplace across Northern Ireland which aims to equip women with the skills they need to start and grow their own business or develop their careers, rising into senior manager and leadership positions.
- Women in NI statistical publication: Publication from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) which considers the different labour market experiences of women and men in Northern Ireland.
- Women in Travel CIC: UK-based, award-winning social enterprise, dedicated to fostering gender inclusion in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry.

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