

# INSIDE-OUT HOSPITALITY:

A STUDY OF WORKING  
CONDITIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY  
SECTOR IN IRELAND



**NUI Galway**  
**OÉ Gaillimh**

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# PROLOGUE

Way back in November of 2013 I tuned into a radio interview between RTE's John Murray and a chef called Leanne McDowell who had been fired from a restaurant in Dublin owned by the restaurateur entrepreneur Jay Bourke. Leanne went on to pursue, and win, a case of unfair dismissal and she was awarded €50,000 in compensation by the Employment Appeals Tribunal (as it was then). The award came two years after the fact of her dismissal, and her radio interview came two years after that. By the time of the RTE interview Leanne had received not one euro of the compensation due to her, and that is still the case today (10 years post dismissal).

I remember being struck by Leanne's story and the human impact of her employer's actions. Leanne spoke about being utterly committed to her role as a chef, and in the 5 years she had worked for Jay Bourke she had never taken a day of sick leave until two days before she was dismissed, having been advised to do so by her doctor. On her 2nd day of sick leave she was called into work and fired. Each year since hearing her interview I have used the podcast as a teaching aid at NUIG, and each year it proves a valuable learning resource for my students.

Fast forward to 2017 when two young women came forward to expose ill-treatment they had witnessed or experienced in the hospitality sector in Galway. They reached out to a serving senator at the time, who reached out to me, to presidents of the students unions at NUIG and GMIT, to trade union representatives, migrant worker representatives etc. to form a grass roots movement called the Galway Hospitality Campaign. Our one objective was to design an award for hospitality employers who treat their staff with dignity and respect. That campaign is still on-going. However a constant obstacle we faced was the lack of solid empirical evidence of working conditions in the sector and so, in 2019, I set out to begin to address that gap.

This research report presents the findings of Phase 1 of that research journey involving a comprehensive survey of hospitality employees and a series of follow-up submissions and interviews. While I was analysing the findings, early in 2020, the Covid19 pandemic hit bringing in its wake a survival challenge to hospitality sector establishments. Clearly not the best time to be reporting largely 'bad news' about the experience of workers in the sector.

However, as we eased our way out of the pandemic, I chose to publish the research findings for two reasons. Firstly, the participants in this study had entrusted me with their voice, a voice that is seldom heard and a collective one that deserves an airing. Secondly, while the reports of workers' experience are at times harrowing, the participants had excellent and inspired suggestions for how the sector might change for the good of all – workers, employers, customers, and society. When I set out on this 1st phase of what I hope will be a substantial body of work, I intended the main deliverable to be a freely-accessible, easy-to-read, informative report that anyone in the sector could find useful. It is for you to decide whether I have achieved that.



**Dr Deirdre Curran**  
**J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics, NUI Galway**





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The 257 respondents who took time to complete the survey.

The 20 research participants who took part in one-to-one interviews or submitted audio files.

The many people who have made contact to confirm that there are issues in the hospitality sector that need to be addressed in order to make it a consistent provider of decent work.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from a study of working conditions of hospitality workers in Ireland. The research was conducted in 2019 by Dr Deirdre Curran of the J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics at the National University of Ireland Galway. This research forms Phase 1 of an ongoing research agenda which will be followed by an international comparative study, and a series of 'best practice' case studies.

Dr Curran has been teaching about employment relations, employment law, and workplace conflict, for over two decades. Her objectives in conducting this research were to; (a) explore levels of ill-treatment in the sector as reported in anecdotal evidence, and (b) to use the research to promote positive change in policy and practice.

In this phase of the project, data is presented from a comprehensive survey (completed by 257 hospitality workers), a series of 15 structured audio submissions, and 5 follow-up interviews. While not claimed as representative of the sector, the findings of this phase of the research make for somewhat shocking and depressing reading. At the very least they highlight issues that need to be explored in further depth through additional research.

Evidence is presented of significant breaches of basic employment rights from; contracts of employment, to payslips, to working hours etc. Perhaps more worrying are the testimonies regarding verbal/psychological/physical abuse and the witnessing/experiencing of harassment and bullying. The absence of mechanisms for employee voice are also striking, whether it be to offer an idea or raise a grievance.

On the positive side, the research participants had clear and concrete suggestions for how working conditions in the sector could be improved.

The intention of the author is to work with interested parties to develop policy and practice that would address issues raised in this research.





## SECTION 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW

### THE PLACE OF HOSPITALITY IN THE IRISH ECONOMY

This section was written in early 2020, prior to the onset of the Covid19 pandemic. It remains to be seen the extent to which the hospitality sector here will revive. Hospitality is one of Ireland's largest industrial sectors which makes a vital contribution to Ireland's economy generally and to Irish tourism specifically. Tourism is Ireland's largest indigenous industry employing 230,000 people nationally, one in every ten of the labour-force. It is twice the size of agriculture and far bigger in employment than the construction industry, the IT industry, or the financial services sector. It crucially cannot be out-sourced or off-shored and its economic benefits are felt both in our cities but also critically throughout rural Ireland. (ITIC Strategy for Growth, 2018).

In its broadest sense, the tourism industry refers to 'the total of all businesses that provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure and leisure activities away from the home environment' (<https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Tourism-Business-Toolkit-VOL1-Chapter1.pdf>). While the hospitality sector is the mainstay of the tourism industry, it is not the only contributor. The industry is worth over €6 billion annually, with over 20,000 businesses operating within this industrial space (ITIC, 2018). Pre-pandemic, ITIC predicted the need to grow the tourism workforce by 80,000 employees by 2025, to cater for the forecasted growth in tourism numbers. The Irish tourism industry includes: accommodation, food and beverage, travel and transport organisations, cultural activities, sports and recreational activities, and retail trade. Tourism is an umbrella industry that covers many sub-sectors, such as the hospitality sector, which in Ireland is comprised of hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs, canteens, and catering operators (EGFSN, 2015).

Tourism generally, and hospitality specifically, has the potential to reach all parts of Ireland, including rural areas.

While other sectors (such as retail) have experienced significant decline as customers resort to the internet to source goods and services through the global marketplace and away from the high-street, the immediate need to eat, drink, and rest cannot be so easily E-sourced. Having said that, hospitality establishments contribute significantly to the emerging gig economy as customers opt to have their food delivered by providers such as Deliveroo etc.

Hospitality is the fastest growing sector of the Irish economy contributing a net worth of over €5 billion. Approximately 177,000 people worked in 18,377 Irish hospitality businesses, from local fast-food outlets to five star hotels pre-pandemic. Accommodation and food services accounted for 8 per cent of employment in the Irish economy, according to the 2018 report of the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group.

The hospitality sector is thus a significant contributor to regional employment and there is a high proportion of seasonal/casual and part-time employment (40%) in the hospitality sector. By early 2020, an estimated thirty per cent of the sector were non-national staff, and more staff will be needed in the future to meet forecasted growth. There are many drivers impacting on the demand for skills in the hospitality sector: growth of new hospitality products and services, growing number of overseas visitors with an increased length of stay, seasonal nature of demand, technological change, value competitiveness, and changing consumer demand (EGFSN, 2015).

### Higher education providers

In terms of higher education provision for the sector, the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group has indicated that there are approximately 90 hotel management, restaurant and catering courses, with over 3,800 enrolments each year (HSOG, 2018). There is an acknowledged need for Irish hospitality educators to work better with the sector to achieve more coherent and coordinated outcomes and to smooth the transition between the education system and the world of work (HEA, 2011; QQI, 2014). Co-operation between educators and employers is also highlighted in policy documents (QQI, 2014: 3) and the Irish Department of Education & Skills (2017) emphasised that higher education providers needed to increase the number of students undertaking a work placement or work-based project as part of their course by 25% by 2021.

### Unique features of hospitality:

In addition to the traditional master-servant ideology of hospitality establishments, there are unique features that make the sector more open to excessive exploitation of workers. The sector is overwhelmingly comprised of small, fragmented establishments, often owner-managed by people who are passionate about food/service, but not necessarily trained to manage people. In contrast many of the larger hotel chains are owned/managed by property developers and business people who may not have experience of the sector per se.

Hospitality establishments are traditionally characterised as hierarchical in structure, with activity lulls interspersed between bouts of intense pressure, in what is a competitive, high-risk market. The predominantly low-paid, low-skilled, non-unionised workforce is bottom-heavy with women, migrants, and transient labour.

While hospitality workers are protected by the same legal regulations as other workers, monitoring and reporting are low resulting in sparse evidence on compliance, and the non-union characteristic of the sector, plus a lack of financial wherewithal, dictate that breaches in employment rights are less likely to be pursued through state structures.

### What are the core questions that this research addresses?

How do employees experience conditions of work in the Hospitality Sector in Ireland? What recommendations can be made for improving conditions of work in this sector?

### The research framework and research agenda:

Drawing on a number of theoretical frameworks, this research report presents, and interprets, the findings of an initial project exploring working conditions in the hospitality sector in Ireland. It will be treated as a precursor to international comparative studies with Scotland and New Zealand, as part of a broader research plan.







Initial discussions have taken place with colleagues at Strathclyde University (Prof Tom Baum), and Auckland University of Technology (Dr Gaye Greenwood). The challenges faced by the Hospitality Sector are certainly not unique to Ireland. Pursuing international comparative studies will provide a framework for other global comparisons and will position Ireland as a driver of research in this area.

A subsequent phase of the research plans to highlight case studies of good practice.

In concluding this report, recommendations will be made to workers, trade unions, employer bodies, and the State as to how the hospitality sector could be transformed into a more desirable and productive work environment.

#### Why is this research significant?

As citizens we interact with the hospitality sector regularly, whether it's having coffee in a local cafe, dinner in a restaurant, or taking a weekend hotel break. The people working in this sector are related to many of us. They are the people we care about.

The work can involve long and antisocial hours, demanding physical and emotional labour, and weaker terms and conditions than many other sectors. A portion of the workforce is transient and over-represented by women and minorities. There is sufficient anecdotal and media evidence to suggest that working conditions are often below a reasonable standard in hospitality, but no independent empirical exploration has been conducted in Ireland to date. The aims of this project are to provide evidence of working conditions (employment rights, employee treatment, voice, HR practices etc.) and to present recommendations based on the findings to sector employers, to trade unions, and to the relevant elected representatives. Academic outputs will include conference presentations and publications in targeted journals.

The principle output however is this report along with sister multi-media spin-offs. The intention is that the findings of this project will be widely disseminated and freely accessible in a format that is easy to read and understand. The author also hopes it will have the effects of provoking debate, triggering further research, and influencing policy and practice. This issue is of significant public interest and the initial findings of the research have attracted attention from national media, public representatives, trade unions, and employer bodies.

## SECTION 2: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods this project illustrates the lived experience of hospitality workers in terms of having their rights upheld at work, and the broader parameters of worker treatment.

The methodology of this Phase 1 project involved three dimensions:

1. An comprehensive on-line anonymous survey of hospitality workers (38 questions, 257 respondents)
2. Oral testimonies from a sample of workers (15 in total) of their lived experience of hospitality work, structured around three questions provided (see below)
3. In-depth interviews with a number of workers (5 in total) with up to five decades of experience in hospitality work

### The survey:

The survey consisted of 38 questions addressing the following categories:

- Bio details of respondents (Age, gender, nationality, length of service in the sector & in current post, number of establishments worked in, hospitality-related qualifications)
- Employment rights (contract terms, minimum wage, payslips, hours worked/rest breaks, paid annual leave, Sunday premium)
- Experience of verbal/psychological/physical abuse
- Witnessing/experiencing harassment or bullying
- Reporting of incidents/actions taken/outcomes
- Opportunities for voice (including trade unions)
- Distribution of tips
- Management feedback
- HR practices (training, opportunities for promotion, benefits beyond basic pay)
- Suggestions for change

A copy of the survey is included in **Appendix 1**.

The final question invited respondents to leave contact details if they would be willing to be interviewed anonymously by the researcher. The hope was for a small number of volunteers so that their 'lived experience' of hospitality work could be explored in more depth. 101 respondents left contact details, which spoke volumes in itself. The average time taken to complete the survey was 18.5 minutes. 18 of the 38 questions included a text box inviting the respondent to provide further details. In some cases all 257 respondents added details. As a result, the survey provided a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data.





Accessing hospitality workers is a challenge. The survey was distributed virtually and organically starting with the author's E-media outlets of email, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. People shared the survey link from there.

The survey opened 03-07-2019 and closed 31-07-2019 [4 full weeks]. An email contact list was drawn up for the 101 respondents willing to be contacted. The researcher emailed them inviting them to participate further, in one of three ways:

- A. A face to face interview with the researcher
- B. An interview via Skype/Zoom
- C. An invitation to submit an audio-recording of themselves answering the following questions:

1. What do/did you like most about working in hospitality?
2. What do/did you like least about working in hospitality?
3. Tell me about an incident where you felt badly/unfairly treated:
  - What happened?
  - What action did you take?
  - What was the outcome?
  - How did it make you feel?

Two reminders were sent out during August/September until responses dried up. Through contact with respondents it became obvious that there was a unique cohort of people who had served decades in the sector and could therefore offer mature longitudinal-based reflections on developments in the sector.

These respondents (5 in total) were interviewed at length (up to 90mins) in a free-flowing unstructured manner. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.

It is important to acknowledge that the survey may have been more attractive to those with negative experiences. Secondly, 257 represents a small fraction of the estimated 177,000 workers employed in hospitality establishments in Ireland at the time. At best the findings of this research provide a 'litmus test' of issues in the sector, and enough indication to suggest that more research is needed.

Thirdly, there are also some specific concerns regarding worker representation in the survey. For example only 16% of respondents declared themselves to be non-Irish which is a smaller proportion than one would expect given the profile of workers in the sector.

What the survey, and subsequent audio-files and interviews do reveal however, is concerning levels of employment rights violations and alarming experiences of ill-treatment. On the positive side, those working in the sector have clear and concrete suggestions for improvements to working conditions.

The next section of this report presents a number of theoretical concepts and frameworks that can be used as lenses to interpret the findings.



## SECTION 3: THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS

This report draws on a number of theoretical frameworks and established frameworks which provide useful lenses for evaluating the employment relationship in the hospitality sector.

- 1) Basic Employment Relations theory
- 2) John Budd's EEV Framework
- 3) Psychological contract
- 4) Emotional labour
- 5) ILO Dimensions of Decent Work



**FIGURE 1: Theoretical Concepts and Frameworks Relevant to the Employment Relationship in Hospitality**

**1) The fundamentals of employment relations theory** provide a useful lens by which to make sense of the data emerging from this research. All of the respondents were part of an employment relationship in the hospitality sector. Whether working as a waiter/waitress, housekeeping staff, kitchen staff, chef, bartender, supervisor etc. they were uniformly on the 'employee' side of the relationship. The associated and largely accepted imbalance of power between employer and employee is manifest to a heightened extent in this sector. Traditionally in Ireland, a mechanism for addressing the inherent power imbalance exists in collectivisation through a trade union. Trade union membership however is notoriously low in this sector and that issue is explored in the data.

'Employee churn' is high in hospitality with a high proportion of employees employed on a part-time or seasonal basis. Women, non-Irish workers, and students are disproportionately represented, relative to other sectors. They are also more likely to be bunched at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy.

While all employees in Ireland have access to a comprehensive range of employment rights, there is evidence to suggest that these rights are not always known to employees, and not always upheld by employers. The proportion of complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) from the hospitality sector is notoriously low, although 'food and drink' establishments feature largely in WRC inspections exposing breaches of employment rights.

Employee voice has recognised importance in employment relations. The willingness and ability of employees to use their voice to share an idea, express a grievance, inform a decision, varies from organisation to organisation and sector to sector. Trust in your employer is a key foundation to employee voice.

**2)** The second framework is John W. Budd's argument for the balance of three elements of the employment relationship, i.e. **efficiency, equity and voice**. Originally published in 2004, Budd's book 'Employment with a Human Face' provides us with a lens through which we can evaluate the findings of this research. Budd argues that every employment relationship requires the balancing of these three objectives.



'Efficiency' represents the primary interest of employers and refers to the effective use of resources (human, financial, technological etc.) which provides the means for production, consumption, and investment. 'Equity' refers to fair treatment in employment and access to fair outcomes (fair wages, rest breaks and holidays, freedom from discrimination, some degree of employment security, opportunities for self-progression and development, work-life balance etc.). Finally, 'voice' refers to opportunities to speak up and to participate in decisions that impact one's work life. In-work democracy as it were, and not just voice where it benefits organisational performance and economic outcomes. Budd argues that a 'healthy' employment relationship, and by implication 'decent work', requires the balancing of these three objectives.

**3) The psychological contract** provides a useful framework for understanding the employment relationship. In addition to a formal written contract which outlines the terms of engagement for the exchange of work for pay, the 'psychological contract' is based on the notion that each party enters into the employment relationship with a set of expectations regarding the process, and outcomes, of that relationship (see Figure 2 below). These expectations are not in writing, may never be vocalised, and are indeed largely subconscious. However, if the psychological contract on either side is breached, it challenges the health and sustainability of the relationship.

For example, the employee may expect opportunities for progression, and work-life balance.

The employer may expect loyalty and commitment. They thus enter into a two-way, unspoken, unwritten reciprocal agreement based on expectation and trust. Sometimes the expectations on one-side are incompatible with those of the other, creating the potential for conflict.

**Employee Provides**                      **Employer Provides**



**FIGURE 2: Expectations of the Psychological Contract**

The employment relationship in hospitality can be scrutinised in terms of the psychological contract and breaches thereof.



4) 'Emotional Labour' is a commodity particularly prominent in service industries such as hospitality. As well as trading one's physical and intellectual labour, the role may require a performance of one's emotions as part of the service to customers. These emotions may not be consistent with one's true emotions and therefore require a degree of acting (surface/deep) that forms part of the wage-effort bargain. The effort and value of emotional labour often goes unrecognised and unrewarded in a low wage sector and yet it forms a very important aspect of service delivery.

5) The **International Labour Organisation's (ILO) sectoral guidelines on 'decent work** and socially responsible tourism' (2017).

In 2017 the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as the global body responsible for determining international labour standards, published guidelines on 'decent work and socially responsible tourism'. The author will argue that these guidelines, mindful both of the needs of workers and of employers, provide a valuable framework by which to evaluate working conditions in the hospitality sector.

The ILO define decent work as 'opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity', and state that decent work explicitly includes the following six dimensions:

1. Opportunities for work	Refers to the need for all persons who want work to be able to find work, since decent work is not possible without work itself.
2. Work in Conditions of freedom	Underscores the fact that work should be freely chosen and not forced on individuals and that certain forms of work are not acceptable in the 21st century (such as bonded labour, slave labour, and child labour). It also means that workers are free to join workers organisations such as trade unions.
3. Productive work	It is essential for workers to have acceptable livelihoods for themselves and their families, as well as to ensure sustainable development and competitiveness of enterprises and countries.
4. Equity in work	Represents workers' need to have fair and equitable treatment and opportunity in work. It encompasses absence of discrimination at work and in access to work and ability to balance work with family life.





5. Security at work	Mindful of the need to help safeguard health, pensions and livelihoods, and to provide adequate financial and other protection in the event of health and other contingencies. It also recognises workers’ need to limit insecurity associated with the possible loss of work and livelihood.
6. Dignity at work	Requires that workers be treated with respect at work, and be able to voice concerns and participate in decision-making about working conditions. An essential ingredient is workers’ freedom to represent their interests collectively.

**FIGURE 3: ILO Dimensions of Decent Work**

The theoretical concepts and frameworks described in this section will be revisited in the concluding section of this report. Meanwhile, the next section will present the main findings, firstly from the survey, and subsequently from the audio-files and interviews.





## SECTION 4: FINDINGS

Survey findings: (A copy of the survey is included in **Appendix 1**)

The survey contained 38 questions as follows:

- Question 1: Declaration of willingness to participate
- Questions 2-11: Profile of the respondent and their work situation [Age, nationality, gender, employment status, number of years in sector, number of establishments worked for, length of time in current job, type of work done, hospitality-related qualifications]
- Questions 12-17: Employment Rights (minimum wage, Sunday premium, holiday pay, terms of employment, wage slips, rest breaks)
- Questions 18-27: Abusive treatment (witnessed or experienced, perpetrator, whether reported, action taken/not)
- Question 28: How are tips shared?
- Questions 29-31: Employee voice & trade unions
- Question 32: Treated with dignity & respect
- Questions 33-36: HR Practices (management feedback, training, pay rise/promotion, benefits beyond basic pay)
- Question 37: Suggestions for change.
- Question 38: leave contact details if willing to engage further

The survey was voluntary and anonymous (unless the respondent left details for Q38).

The following text appeared at the start of the survey:

**This research is being conducted by Dr Deirdre Curran and Sharon Spellman from the J. E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics at NUI Galway.**

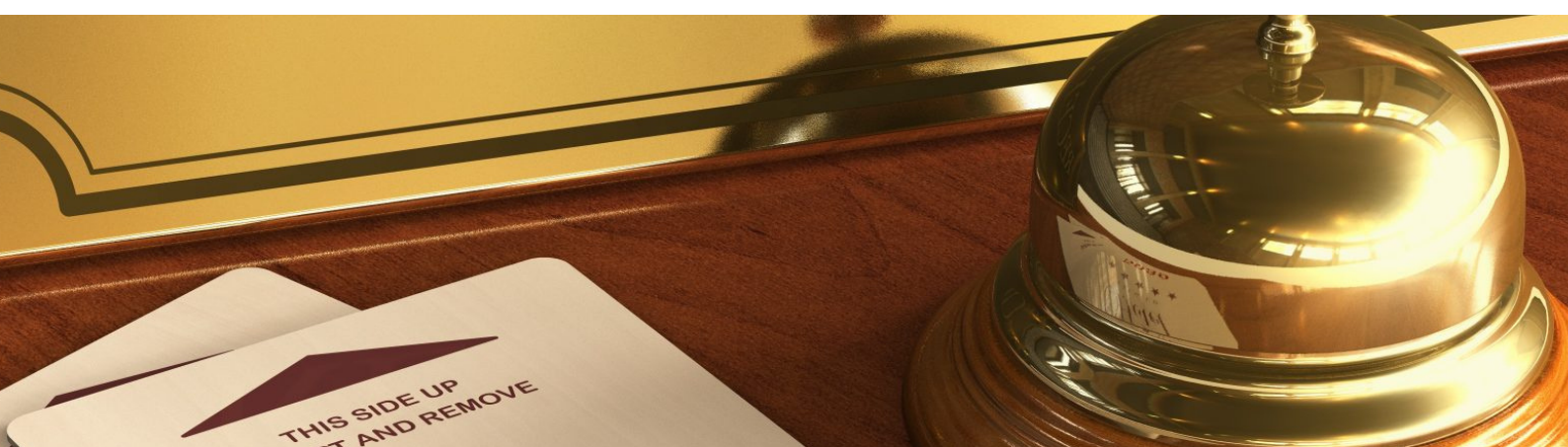
**Our motive is to gather information about the treatment and experience of workers in the Hospitality Sector.**

**The survey is anonymous. You don't need to include your name or the establishment you work for unless you so wish.**

**Our hope is that the findings of this research will lead to positive change in the treatment of workers in the Hospitality Sector.**

**We value your help in this regard.**

Average time taken to complete the survey was 18.5 minutes (an indicator of the time and attention paid to the responses). Sixteen times throughout the survey respondents were invited to insert qualitative details by typing into a text box. In many cases all 257 respondents added details which greatly inflated the amount of data gathered. This report will use the actual words of respondents to the greatest extent possible as they most eloquently illustrate the challenges faced by workers in the sector.



Profile of Survey Respondents:

While the details are presented below the common respondent profile characteristics that emerge are; over 26yrs old [60%], Female [61%], Irish [78.6%], has worked over 3 years in the sector [73%], has worked in more than one establishment [77%], has worked for over a year with current employer [69%], considers themselves to be a permanent employee [56%], and has no hospitality-related qualifications [73%].

Age:

40% of respondents were aged between 18 & 25. 60% were over the age of 26. 55% were aged between 26 & 65.

Age	Number	%
18-25	103	40%
26-35	67	26%
36-45	42	16%
46-55	32	13%
56-65	12	5%
Prefer not to say	1	

Gender:

61% of respondents identified as female, 38% as male.

Gender	Number	%
Female	157	61%
Male	97	38%
Prefer not to say	2	1%
Not Listed	1	1%

Nationality:

78.6% of respondents who answered this question declared themselves as 'Irish'. Four people (1.7%) declared dual-nationality: 'Irish-American', 'Canadian-Irish', Irish-British, and Brazilian-Italian. Other nationalities (19.7%) were as follows:

Nationality	Number
Polish	6
Indian	5
Romanian	5
Croatian	4
Brazilian	3
British	3
Lithuanian	3
Czech	2
Italian	2
Slovakian	2
Australian	2
Hungarian	2
Uruguayan	1
Scottish	1
Estonian	1
Non-Irish (un-specified)	1
	43

How long have you worked in the hospitality sector?

73% had worked for over 3 years in the sector.

Years Worked	Number	%
<3 years	70	27%
3-10 years	106	41%
10-20 years	50	20%
20+ years	31	12%

How many hospitality establishments have you worked in?

77% had experience of working in more than one establishment. Just over 50% of respondents had worked in 3 or more establishments.

No. of Establishments	Number	%
1 Establishment	58	22.5%
2 Establishments	69	27%
3 Establishments	37	14%
4 Establishments	36	14%
More than 4	57	22.5%

How long have you worked with your current employer?

69% of respondents had over one year's experience with their current employer.

Years Worked with Current Employer	Number	%
<1 year	80	31%
1-3 years	92	36%
>10 years	85	33%

Type of work done

Respondents came from all areas of hospitality working. The three most popular responses were 'waiter/waitress', 'bar staff', and 'variety of roles'. Other respondents were chefs, porter/concierge, cleaning/house-keeping, receptionist, kitchen porter, food preparation, barista, supervisor/manager, and administration.

Contract status

56% of respondents described themselves as 'permanent'. The agency employed figure is very low so most are directly employed. It is not clear what 'other' refers to but these people may not know their employment status &/or may not have received a contract.

Status	Number	%
Temporary	88	34%
Permanent	145	56%
Agency	2	1.5%
Other	22	8.5%

Do you have hospitality-related qualifications?

Only 26% of the respondents had hospitality-related qualifications.



## EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Respondents were asked about their employment rights specifically: Minimum Wage, Sunday Premium, Holiday Pay, Terms of Employment, Wage Slips, and Rest Breaks.

These are legal rights that all employees in Ireland are entitled to. Rates of non-compliance by employers ranged from 12% to 70%. The rights most often denied were Sunday Premium entitlements [70% non-compliant], rest break entitlement [52% non-compliant], and being given a written account of Terms of Employment on commencement [43% non-compliant].

While anything less than 100% indicates a breach of law, the employment rights most likely to be upheld are minimum wage [88% compliant], wages slips [84% compliant], and holiday pay [75% compliant].

The amount of the minimum wage for over 18s was provided as were details of rest break entitlements. Each question required a yes/no response.

Legal Entitlement	Yes (%)	No (%)	Other
Minimum Wage (at the time €9.80)	88	12	n/a
Sunday Premium	25	70	5
Holiday Pay	75	20	5
Terms of Employment on commencement	57	43	n/a
Wage slips showing gross pay & deductions	84	16	n/a
Rest breaks (details of entitlements provided)	48	52	n/a

The law represents a minimum standard that all workers in Ireland are entitled to expect. Many employers go beyond that minimum. In my experience, there are two primary issues regarding employment rights. Firstly, workers are often unaware of their legal rights and unsure of how to source relevant information. Secondly, enforcement is an issue. Workers in precarious sectors such as hospitality, are reluctant to raise issues of legal rights, in fear of negative consequences. The primary enforcement body in Ireland is the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) which offers state-funded, independent services regarding employment rights including information, mediation, adjudication, inspection, and enforcement. In order to deliver most of these services the WRC must be approached by a complainant claiming breach of legal rights. The exception is the inspection service which can 'visit places of employment and carry out investigations on behalf of the Commission in order to ensure compliance with equality and employment-related legislation.' ([www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie)) In the most recent Annual Report (2019), WRC inspectors carried out 656 inspections of establishments in the 'Food and Drink' sector exposing a non-compliance rate of 67% impacting 14,113 employees. 64 inspections of 'Hotels' revealed a non-compliance rate of 58% impacting 3,950 employees. Regarding non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage Act alone, these inspections recovered over €602k in wages paid below the legal minimum.

These figures can only represent the 'tip of the iceberg' as many workers are unaware of their rights and the existence of the WRC, and there is a high degree of non-reporting internally in hospitality establishments, not to mention taking a case to the WRC.

## ABUSIVE TREATMENT

The findings regarding ill-treatment are stark and somewhat depressing. Almost 77% of respondents reported experiencing verbal abuse sometimes/often. Almost 64% reported experiencing psychological abuse sometimes/often. 15% reported experiencing physical abuse sometimes/often.

Type of Abuse	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
Verbal	23	53.7	23.3
Physical	2.3	13.2	84.4
Psychological	18.7	45.1	36.2

### Harassment

55% of respondents reported witnessing/experiencing harassment. In the text box inviting details, 122 respondents wrote something.

Table 1: Overview of Responses Regarding Harassment

Most likely form of harassment (if explicit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sexual harassment explicitly mentioned 34 times</li><li>Age/new staff harassment explicitly mentioned 11 times</li><li>Racial harassment explicitly mentioned 7 times</li></ul>
Harassment indicators cited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Verbal aggression</li><li>Sexual references/comments/innuendo</li><li>Demeaning tasks</li><li>Unwanted touching/slapping/grabbing</li><li>Arrogance/rudeness</li><li>Victimisation</li><li>Racist comments/jokes/slurs</li><li>Belittling new staff</li><li>Derogatory comments about physical appearance</li></ul>

### Box 1: Indicative Quotes on Harassment

(i) I was told to suck my manager's penis because I couldn't bring the lemons fast enough.

(ii) I have regularly witnessed verbal abuse from management and supervisors to lower level staff.

(iii) Managers always talking down to staff including myself, making staff feel on edge. The hierarchical system was awful with supervisors etc treating those 'below' them terribly. Similarly heard many racist slurs and jokes mostly aimed at Irish staff from foreign management.

(iv) Everywhere I have worked I have seen harassment of different kinds. Bosses harassing staff, chefs harassing staff, serious number of customers harassing young female staff but it's all swept under the carpet "It's part of the industry".

(v) An older member of bar staff in the restaurant I worked in 2016 acted inappropriately towards me during my time there. He spoke grossly and suggestively to me regularly; both alone, in front of other staff members and in in front of customers. He consequently felt me up in the restaurant kitchen, the action was met with laughter by all who witnessed it. Apart from that I have been hit on during service and pressured to give my number to a particularly aggressive male customer whilst serving. In two of four positions I was shouted at by customers without prompt, and had my appearance ridiculed a number of times during service.

(vi) It's endemic in the industry. Young in-experienced workers often from other countries are treated poorly.

(vii) Manager implied he would promote me should I accept his favours.

(viii) Much older male colleague kept acting inappropriately with me- would come up behind me in small secluded corners of kitchen/restaurant and tickle me and grab me unnecessarily. Despite repeatedly telling him to stop he didn't. Finally plucked up courage to speak to (male) boss. He was not very sympathetic and his 'solution options', basically made it out to be ME with the problem.

(ix) The chef in my current place of employment constantly talks about all the female servers in both English and Polish and makes sexual references

about them and is always stroking the female supervisors etc.

## ABUSIVE TREATMENT

### Workplace Bullying

63% of respondents reported witnessing/experiencing bullying. In the text box inviting details, 133 respondents wrote something (6 of whom said they had not experienced/witnessed bullying).

Table 2: Overview of Responses Regarding Bullying

Most likely perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Owner/Manager/Supervisor/Chef (cited 67 times)</li><li>Interestingly customers were not mentioned.</li></ul>
Bullying indicators cited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Verbal/psychological/emotional abuse</li><li>Inappropriate comments (sexual/racial)</li><li>Shouting</li><li>Chef deliberately getting orders wrong</li><li>Taunting/belittling/ making fun of/putting down</li><li>Excessive/unfair allocation of work times and tasks</li><li>Threats</li><li>Malicious gossip/rumours/lies</li><li>Isolating/ignoring</li><li>Demeaning jokes</li><li>Excessive reprimanding</li><li>Derogatory name-calling</li><li>Imitating accent or mannerisms</li><li>Intimidating behaviour</li><li>Humiliation in front of colleagues/customers</li></ul>
Frequently cited outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Mental ill-health</li><li>Quit/forced out/fired</li><li>Absenteeism</li><li>Feeling sick before work shift</li><li>Fear</li><li>Brought to tears</li><li>Feeling stupid</li></ul>

### Box 2: Indicative Quotes on bullying

(i) Excessive and repetitive giving out to staff over extremely minor things, often even if no mistake was made. Name calling and “joking” sexual comments.

(ii) I myself was very badly bullied in my workplace only 5 years ago. I was ignored, not given breaks but worst of all his wife would come In with little notes explaining things she had seen or heard of happening accuse us of them and then make us sign off on the answers we gave. Eventually I was called into a meeting (where I was not allowed representation) and questioned as to why I never said goodbye going home one day, why I NEARLY didn't charge for a coffee and why I didn't do an order the way she wanted it done. 3 days later I was sent a letter of dismissal. I was not allowed back onto the premises to collect my belongings, I did not receive notice, no compensation, not even all my holiday pay. All this from a guy who would not allow me go home the day my partner had a miscarriage as he had "nobody to cover me.

(iii) He would send me emails listing things I did wrong. Worst of all he would cc everyone else in the email so everyone I worked with could see how stupid he thought I was.

(iv) An older member of bar staff in the restaurant I worked in 2016 acted inappropriately towards me during my time there. He spoke grossly and suggestively to me regularly; both alone, in front of other staff members and in in front of customers. He consequently felt me up in the restaurant kitchen, the action was met with laughter by all who witnessed it. - I have been undermined whilst training new staff members in on several occasions in two different jobs. - I have experienced kitchen staff shouting abuse at waiting staff in two of four positions.

(v) A manager of mine would tell me what staff called me then put me working with them and I was asked to report on them daily.

(vi) One of Chefs exerted psychological pressure and used offensive words as a normal form of contact. Head chef knew about but did nothing.



## ABUSIVE TREATMENT

(vii) At a restaurant that I worked one particular guy was bullied, it did affect his self-esteem, his work, lifestyle and sleep and quality of life generally. For a good while stopped working out of fear.

### Voice at work and Reporting of Incidents

**Table 3: Overview of Responses Regarding Voice**

Q23 If you suffered or witnessed abuse in the workplace, who were the main perpetrators? N = 175	<b>[See Appendix 4]</b> Times mentioned: Manager/supervisor/equivalent (104) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owner (46)</li> <li>• Customer (42)</li> <li>• Colleague (35)</li> <li>• Chef (17)</li> </ul>
Q24 Were incidents reported? N = 179	<b>[See Appendix 5]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes = 55% (99)</li> <li>• No = 45% (80)</li> </ul>
Q24 Reported to whom? N = 179	<b>[See Appendix 5]:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower level manager/supervisor (x31)</li> <li>• HR (x23)</li> <li>• Higher level manager (x16)</li> <li>• Owner (x7)</li> <li>• Trade Union (x3)</li> <li>• Head Chef (x2)</li> <li>• WRC, Bosses' wife, social welfare (x1)</li> </ul>
Q25 Was action taken? N = 158	<b>[See appendix 6]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No 53% (x 83)</li> <li>• Yes 24% (x 38)</li> <li>• Don't know/Other 23% (x 36)</li> </ul>
Q25 Was action taken? N = 158	<b>[See appendix 7]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unqualified Yes 11</li> <li>• Yes/but</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
Q27 Why did you not report? N = 145	<b>Most frequent reasons:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fear of consequences</li> <li>2. Belief that nothing would change or situation would get worse</li> <li>3. Perpetrator was owner/manager/relative</li> <li>4. No one to report to</li> <li>5. Bad behaviour accepted as 'normal'</li> <li>6. No culture of reporting</li> <li>7. Incident I was a witness rather than victim</li> <li>8. Plan to quit</li> <li>9. New/from another country</li> <li>10. Would be seen as over-reacting</li> <li>11. Already reported by others</li> </ol>

Q29 Do/did you feel that you have/had opportunities at work to express your views/opinions/concerns etc?  
N = 257

- No = 123
- Yes = 107
- Other = 27

Q30 Are you a member of a Trade Union?  
N = 257

- 77% No
- 23% Yes (\*\*overly inflated)

Q31 Would you consider joining a trade union? Please explain your answer.  
N = 257

- 1. Yes (or already a member) [92]
- 2. No union/don't know about unions
- 3. Not staying or on temp contract
- 4. No
- 5. No faith in the union to make a difference
- 6. Don't feel the need
- 7. Don't know
- 8. Fear of employer reaction
- Can't afford fee

\*\* SIPTU [Ireland's largest Trade Union] shared the survey link with all of their members in the hospitality sector. This inflated the % of trade union members beyond what would be predicted for the sector.

### Tips distribution

Q28 asked respondents 'How are/were tips shared in your workplace?' At the time this research was being conducted the National Minimum Wage (Protection of Employee Tips) Bill 2017, was being debated in the houses of government. The Bill proposed to make it illegal for employers to withhold tips from staff, and this had generated much media and public debate. The Bill had garnered widespread political support of all parties except the ruling party of the time (Fine Gael) who proposed an alternative Bill that would make it illegal for employers to use tips to supplement wages and nothing beyond that.

While there was considerable anecdotal evidence that withholding of tips was an issue (beyond that of topping up wages), there was no solid empirical evidence from workers who rely on tips to supplement their wages. Hence the decision to include this specific question. Almost all respondents provided details (255).

In many cases the person who served the customer kept the tip. In many cases there was some system/criteria for sharing tips that may/may not be seen as fair. Some respondents never received any tips.

**Table 4: Overview of Responses Regarding Tips**

<p>Portion/all of tips taken by employer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supplement the till</li><li>• Cover walk-outs</li><li>• Buy newspapers</li><li>• Cover staff events</li><li>• Pay staff wages</li><li>• Cover staff taxes</li><li>• Make up the xmas bonus</li><li>• Cover staff or management xmas party</li></ul>	<p>Tips shared as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Split between front of house and back of house (90/10, 75/25, 70/30, 50/50)</li><li>• Shared per shift, end of day, weekly, monthly, annually</li><li>• Shared based on staff category</li><li>• Based on employment status (FT/PT), length of service</li><li>• Manager favouritism</li></ul>
<p>Tips with-held</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Credit card tips with-held in part or total</li><li>• Service charge</li><li>• Tips added to hotel bill</li></ul>	<p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No tips received</li><li>• Manager, owner, head chef, bosses wife get a cut</li></ul>



## SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

The respondents had a comprehensive range of suggestions for improvement based on their experience of working in the sector. All 257 respondents contributed to this question. It is often workers on the front-line who have the best perspective on how things can and should be changed for the better. The suggestions ranged from no-cost to low-cost to high-cost and from short-medium-long term, and are listed in Table 5 below.

**TABLE 5: RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE (N = NUMBER OF TIMES REFERRED TO)**

<p><b>Pay &amp; Tips N = 127</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better pay</li> <li>• Living wage</li> <li>• Equal pay</li> <li>• Pay for all hours worked</li> <li>• Pay progression</li> <li>• Fair share of tips</li> <li>• Overtime/premium/holiday pay</li> <li>• Sick pay</li> <li>• Free uniforms and uniform laundry</li> <li>• Performance bonuses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Working Hours N = 75</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More flexibility</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Fairer rostering</li> <li>• More predictability</li> <li>• Less hours</li> <li>• Prospect of a Sunday/weekend/special holiday off</li> <li>• Ability to schedule holidays</li> <li>• No split shifts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other rights, enforcement, and support N = 38</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum rights guaranteed</li> <li>• Basic written contract</li> <li>• More legal regulation</li> <li>• Better enforcement</li> <li>• Information about rights</li> <li>• Access to trade unions</li> <li>• Regular inspections</li> <li>• More accountability</li> <li>• More severe penalties</li> </ul>	<p><b>Management/HR Practices N = 52</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roster sufficient staff</li> <li>• Career advancement opportunities</li> <li>• Flatter Management structure</li> <li>• Training [management training, job specific training, anti-racism training, etc.]</li> <li>• Professionalise - Hospitality related qualifications</li> <li>• Compassionate management</li> <li>• Effective/responsive HR</li> <li>• Adhering to policies</li> <li>• Effective process for addressing bullying</li> <li>• Mental health supports</li> <li>• Supportive feedback</li> <li>• Equal treatment</li> <li>• Behavioural standards/house rules</li> <li>• Effective grievance procedure</li> <li>• More leadership – less management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Treatment at work N = 55</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praise/appreciation</li> <li>• Less harassment/bullying</li> <li>• Dignity and respect</li> <li>• Effective process to address ill treatment</li> <li>• Bilateral communication</li> <li>• Involvement in decisions which impact staff</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Protection from abusive customers</li> <li>• Open, trusting environment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other suggestions N = 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work space design based on ergonomics</li> <li>• Free/subsidised food on shift</li> <li>• A regulatory body for the industry</li> <li>• More/reformed education for the sector</li> <li>• Clear job roles</li> <li>• More research on the sector</li> <li>• Proper adequate work equipment</li> <li>• Stronger leadership from employer associations</li> </ul>



### BOX 3: INDICATIVE QUOTES ON SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

*(i) Establish working hours policies and minimum notice policies; Determine fair tips sharing system; Develop a focused process to report mistreatment; Charge a fee for organisation with bad practices regarding staff; Award best practices of HR in the hospitality sector.*

*(ii) I think there is an issue in every place I have worked with managers and owners being too money focused. I understand that if you don't want to pay another person if you feel you don't have to, but no boss of mine has ever listened to me when I explain that it cannot be helped that my customer service will go down if you don't provide enough staff.*

*(iii) More (any) consequences for chefs being belligerent, a more equal balance of power.*

*(iv) Hospitality needs people first of all who are interested in that area. It needs professionals in all aspects and sides. When managers do not hire a professional waiter (tourism school graduate) because they want to save money and hire a person with no experience and who just wants to work for 1 or 2 months... then the profession is degraded. Moreover some managers themselves are not professionals.*

*(v) Educate hotel owners and managers in HR and how to treat employees to get the most out of them without pushing them like slaves. A bit harsh but from my experience, the only value employees added was they were customer facing and they were there to serve the customer, no matter what.*

*(vi) Trade unions for waiting staff and perhaps an independent body you could report to given most small businesses don't have a hr system in place.*

*(vii) Stronger governance and accountability. No hotel I have been in adheres to working time act. If they can get away with paying less than minimum wage they will.*

*(viii) Basic workers right need to be implemented asap. We work all bank holidays and Sundays at no extra cost. We work EVERY occasion, Xmas, new years, mothers day, father's day, Valentine's etc etc. Whilst other families are enjoying themselves we are working, it's very disheartening and depressing. You feel sub human and not a part of real society. The excuse "sure that's the industry" is not good enough.*

*(ix) Open communication between levels within the organisation. Reward and recognition for staff - not necessarily monetary but verbal recognition would be an improvement. Recognition even for full attendance to work throughout the year, length of service recognition would be simple yet very effective improvements.*

*(x) More respect towards employees, less BS from company side. As long as budget and profit is before everything, hotels will not be better places.*

## AUDIO SUBMISSION FINDINGS:

Fifteen respondents submitted audio files, self-recorded on their phone, answering three simple questions. This revealed itself to be a powerful method, as respondents were using their own words, and the tone and emotion could be heard in their responses.

### Q1: What do you like about working in hospitality?

Overwhelmingly respondents mentioned 'interacting with people' in their response, whether it be co-workers or customers, making friends, interacting with, and learning from, people from different cultures. The satisfaction of delivering a great service and being rewarded with a tip, or a complement to you, &/or your boss, also featured strongly. Other 'likes' included - the ability to build English language competence, learning to deal with challenging customers, working independently, the unpredictability/variety of the work, specialised training (e.g as a sommelier), cooking creativity & innovation, and the day-to-day buzz of a busy establishment.

### Box 4: Quotes from respondents on what they 'liked' about working in hospitality.

*(i) Working with people. When you have good working relationships your colleagues in the tourism business. Also you're looking after people from all different sides of the world.*

*(ii) I've worked in three different hospitality places in Ireland and across the board, staff is the thing I liked most about my jobs.*

*(iii) I am under no supervision (23h00 to 07h00) and able to carry out my duties to the best of my ability without the constant flow of managers, assistant managers & departmental heads breathing down my neck.*

*(iv) Some decent staff and there's some interesting characters in the bar that you strike up a rapport with.*

*(v) I loved the interactions with customers. Sometimes it's really nice to remember what people are usually eating and they usually want the same routine, and it was really nice to see them and say hello and bring them the food they always want and they appreciate it.*

*(vi) The thing I liked most was the people I worked with, particularly the other waiters and waitresses at my own level....we were all at the same stages and we got on really well. There was a great sense of camaraderie and that definitely wasn't fostered by management. We kind of thrived despite them, not because of them.*

*(vii) The creativity and innovation. Diversity of opportunities and experiences which a chef occupation can offer. The main motivation or goal is to do something that satisfies people or makes them happy.*

*(viii) The place is really busy Monday to Sunday, January through December, it's brilliant and the team is great because only professional people who really want to work and have experience can be working in such a busy place.*

(ix) *I enjoyed the unpredictability of being a waiter. You never knew what you were going to face on a night. There was a huge social aspect. You got to meet up to 50 people every night. There's also a huge amount of satisfaction in being able to look after your tables and especially when they show appreciation back to you, whether it be in tips, or just thanking you personally, or sending on good information to your boss.*

(x) *I got to work with a Sommelier and he spent a lot of time talking me through the wines, and I had the opportunity to learn from him, to a degree where I could take over his role on a busy night, if he wasn't there.*

(xi) *I like my staff. I'm the manager of a spa and gym department where I work. My staff are great. They really have each other's back. I'm very lucky. We get on great. We get on better I'd say than any other department. That's what make me like going in to work.*

(xii) *I worked with two of my best friends and we kinda got the run of the place as in the owner wasn't there that often so it was fun in that sense. We got to choose our own hours. It was flexible that way and we could swap shifts around. And in was in the middle of town as well so that was handy.*

## **Q2: What do you dislike about working in hospitality?**

The list of things participants disliked about working in hospitality was long and varied.

Bad management, bullying/disrespect from work colleagues, unsociable work hours, low pay, work pressure, and work overload featured most frequently. Other 'dislikes' included:

- Sexual harassment by colleagues
- Sleep deprivation
- Conveyor-belt mentality
- Demanding customers
- Physical effort required
- Low standard of colleagues work

## **Boxes 5 & 6: Quotes on Aspects of the Job Disliked**

*"Heavy lifting massive black trays carried on our shoulders. Some girls had to take a nurophen-plus before coming to work because their backs and shoulders were wrecked. We were given no training on how to lift things properly and you daren't complain because they [managers] didn't care. For wedding service you carried three hot plates which was really awkward and you had to carry them a really long distance and often girls would drop plates, or burn themselves with gravy or whatever so it was physically hard labour."*





*(i) I hated the times customers felt I was a drop out from society or spoke to me as if I had not tried to make things right for them.*

*(ii) I hated being made to feel guilty by colleagues by needing time off, or even just wanting it.*

*(iii) I hated that I started to resent colleagues for the same reason. I hated being tired.*

*(iv) I hated not being fed. I hated not having a place to take a breath and be alone.*

*(v) I hated getting so sucked in that I have lost friends because I always put my job first because I had been tricked into thinking that this is the only way to work.*

*(vi) So, there was nothing I "liked least", I HATED aspects of my job. And it is sad that the job made me feel that way.*

**Q3: Tell me about an incident where you felt badly/unfairly treated.**

Q3 asked respondents to share an INCIDENT EXPERIENCED that made them feel unfairly/badly treated, using four sub-questions to structure their audio recording:

- What happened?
- What action did you take?
- What was the outcome?
- How did it make you feel?

This method revealed powerful personal narratives of ill treatment. Table 6 below outlines the skeleton of the narratives shared.

**TABLE 6: RESPONDENT SHARED INCIDENTS**

	The Incident	Action	Outcome	Impact
R1	Owner put my private number on Social Media platforms and on notice in each room.	I took it down and added 2extra hours (min wage) to pay claim for on-call	Owner re-posted my private number and refused to pay on-call	Customer calls at all hours. Even after leaving job. Had to get counselling for work stresses.
R2	Owner constantly undermining, criticising, shouting at me in front of colleagues	Went to CIS but they said there was nothing could be done as no law broken	I eventually left even though, as a single mother I needed the job	Feeling bad about myself "if you're constantly being told you're stupid...."
R3 1 of 2	Was in charge of till while owner on holidays. Accused of stealing from till.	Defended myself in a meeting. Told him his wife had been taking money. He got very angry.	Wife confirmed she had taken money.	Very unpleasant and upsetting. Left job a month later.
R4	Couldn't do a heavy moving job as on my own. In front of the guests manager shouted that I was 'a f...ing idiot & a lazy c..t for not doing my job'	The GM was away on leave nothing could be done by me, except report it to the duty manager & was told - 'well what do you expect from that man' - end of story.	None	Every day I go to work, I wonder what I will now be accused of. To find another job at my age is very difficult so I do not want to rock the boat & lose my position.
R5	Made an error in reservation. Was away on hols when I got a 'really nasty message' from my manager	Explained what happened and tried to defend myself. Decided to resign.	Called to a meeting with manager where 'she gave me a piece of her mind'. Claimed my resignation letter was 'cold and callous' even though family had overseen it.	Upset me and caused a lot of stress. Spoiled my holiday. When I came back I was very tense. Didn't want to go to work. Didn't want to get out of bed.
R6	Have a repetitive strain injury caused by work.	None as afraid I'll lose my job.	None	Victim of 'conveyor belt mentality'. Low pay. Lonely night work.
R7	Bottle clearing incident. Sweltering heat. No PPE. Slogged all day.	Comment from manager was 'Jayzus I thought you'd have that done by now'. I didn't take any action.	None	Exhausted and sore. You were treated by managers 'like a dog'. Manager never referred to me by name ('Young lad')



**TABLE 6: RESPONDENT SHARED INCIDENTS**

	The Incident	Action	Outcome	Impact
R8	Asked to get jugs. Couldn't find any anywhere. Checked everywhere. And I met the General Manager as I was coming back up the corridor and he was roaring at me: 'Have you found those fking jugs yet?' And he grabs me by arm and drags me across the kitchen, roaring – "if you pulled your head outa yer fkin arse and opened your eyes you might find some fkin jugs"	Everyone knew but I took no action. Staff were sympathetic and supportive. Duty managers wouldn't do anything because they were afraid of him.	Next day he was nice to me as he knew he was wrong, but no apology.	I was very upset at the time. There was a sense of acceptance of this behaviour. It was quite normalised.
R9	A customer made his way behind the bar and ran his hands up and down me, pushing me into the wall.	No action taken	A colleague said - "You're a pretty girl behind a bar, that sort of stuff is just going to happen to you."	This happened when I was 23, I am now nearly 35 and I can still feel my face burning hot, and the pressure of the night in question, and the shock of hearing that comment from my colleague, whom I considered a friend and a protective work friend.
R10	Sexually harassing comments made frequently to her by Chef: "I love watching you walk away. I'd split you in half. You probably lost your virginity after a boy put a few drops of something in your drink."	Recorded them on her phone but took no action	None	Degraded, demeaned, violated
R11	New chef misbehaved on a daily basis, shouting at staff, making inappropriate sexually-motivated jokes. Once I stood up for my colleague and got into an argument with the head chef	I end up in the HR office with owner's sister (who had no HR qualification or background)	The whole incident was turned against me and with no further investigation all was swept off the table. A few months later I received allegation for my misbehaviour and on those basis I have been dismissed	It makes you feel like crap, like you have chosen the wrong profession because there is nowhere to run, it's like a time loop, this is happening over and over again every day.



**TABLE 6: RESPONDENT SHARED INCIDENTS**

	The Incident	Action	Outcome	Impact
R12	No specific incident to report. Would like to feel more appreciated, less like a number. Perhaps a bonus or staff party for example.			
R13	Customer (friend of chef) asked where duck was sourced from and chef used it as an opportunity to humiliate.	I reported back to the customer what the chef had said.	Chef was initially angry but was more respectful after that.	The incident made me feel terrible. I almost quit the job. I didn't want to go to work. I definitely didn't want to work with him. It made getting to know the job much harder and I'd say twice as long.
R14	Put under pressure to cut short holidays to meet investors. Micro-managed by a control freak.	No HR Dept. – so the person you are complaining about is the person you're complaining to. We have zero back-up,	None	You're made feel guilty about taking time off. I worked 53hrs one week and 47hrs the next. Takes offence if you expect to get pay/time off. Constantly undermined.
R15	The owner came in drunk one night and the place was packed and I was serving a couple at a table and he got into his head that I knew them and was giving them free food. He was shouting at me and demanding to see the receipt. And I got so muddled I couldn't find the receipt and he was accusing me of stealing in front of all the customers	In the end it got so toxic we decided to leave.	None	Muddled. Embarrassed. Upset.

### 'Mature' Interview Findings

Five interviews were conducted with respondents who had been working in the sector for up to five decades. These respondents had a unique longitudinal perspective on how the sector had evolved over the decades, the good and the bad of changes in policy and practice, why some of the changes had occurred, and what could be done to make the sector a better place to work.

## TABLE 7: THEMES EMERGING

Employment Rights	Pay Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff not knowing their rights</li> <li>• Not enough rights</li> <li>• Weak contracts (including 'zero hours' and 'if &amp; when').</li> <li>• Payslips not clear re actual wages and deductions</li> <li>• Insufficient monitoring/enforcement</li> <li>• No opportunity for rest breaks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low wage rates (minimum)</li> <li>• Unpredictable income levels</li> <li>• Salaried staff not paid overtime</li> <li>• Inaccurate pay</li> <li>• With-holding of tips.</li> <li>• Non-nationals and the lowering of pay and standards</li> </ul>
Management/Ownership	Worker Treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owner-occupied Vs chains/larger establishments (which are more likely to have structures and policies in place)</li> <li>• Poor (untrained) management and poor HR practice.</li> <li>• Lack of proper grievance policies &amp; procedures</li> <li>• Over-focus on 'bottom-line'</li> <li>• Post-recession (80s) buying/building of hotels by developers who had no knowledge of the sector (run by accountants)</li> <li>• Devaluing of experience</li> <li>• Challenges of diversity</li> <li>• Nepotism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress caused by bad management, excessive workloads, working hours</li> <li>• Bullying and harassment</li> <li>• Staff exploitation</li> <li>• Excessive surveillance</li> <li>• Employer resistance to Trade Unions &amp; employee reluctance to join</li> <li>• Students putting up with ill-treatment as they are transient</li> <li>• Fear of speaking out</li> <li>• Abusive customers</li> </ul>

### Working Conditions

- Unpredictable and changeable work hours
- Excessive workloads
- Work-life imbalance
- Lack of training
- Poor opportunities for progression
- Systemic cultural issues
- Standing all day

### Broader Context Issues

- Shortage of chefs (so bad behaviour tolerated)
- Public perception of the profession
- Dumbing down of profession – not attractive to school-leavers
- Colleges focus on hospitality 'management' rather than other roles
- High turnover of staff.
- Understaffing
- Price of local accommodation
- Younger employees see it as a temporary way of making money
- Students flooding labour market
- Sophistication of dietary choices

*If health inspectors can come in and close the place down because the kitchen counter is cluttered – how can people get away with bullying and harassing staff to the point where they're out on sick leave?*

*There are cameras in every square inch and we have been informed that some are hidden. The manager has a camera in his office and on his phone and he texts in from home saying 'Table 3 haven't had their starter yet'.*



## 'MATURE' INTERVIEWEE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

**Better training** for all staff, some of it obligatory minimum, to make it a profession worth pursuing.

**Better wages, pay progression**, other rewards, performance-based pay.

**WLB** initiatives.

A **minimum set of standards** should apply to all establishments, promoted by representative bodies.

Education, monitoring, and enforcement of **rights**.

**Allow unions** to represent employees' voice.

**Proper contracts** – with sufficient and predictable hours to enable young people to access a loan/mortgage.

Bullying and harassment **inspectors**.

Protection for **abusive customers**.

Proper **HR policies and procedures**, adhered to.

**Respect** shown from top-down.

Provide a viable **apprentice-type alternative** to college for those not that way inclined.

Address **under-staffing**.

Put the focus back on **excellent service**.

## SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This research indicates that the work experience of hospitality workers is 'less than ideal' and needs further investigation.

While enforced shut-downs precipitated by C19, theoretically provided space for reflection and improvement, there is a danger that issues identified pre-pandemic, may simply be exaggerated post-pandemic. Research evidence needs to be gathered to explore the 'new' reality.

Hospitality workers raised their voices through this research and those voices deserve to be heard. The intention is to circulate this report widely so that these workers come to see that they are being heard.

There are unique features of hospitality work that lend it to a culture of ill treatment. However, while that may help explain, it in no way excuses.

The Hospitality sector forms an important part of our economy. This importance will be exaggerated as the country strives to recover from the devastating impact of C19. The contention of this report is that addressing some of the issues faced by hospitality workers will benefit the sector in its recovery.

Things could be better. Hospitality workers know how to improve the work environment and they have some excellent insights. Their suggestions for change, illustrated in this report, range from no-low-high cost, and short-medium-long term. Hospitality employers need to listen to, and act on, the suggestions of their employees, for the benefit of all.

This report contains worrying indications of verbal/psychological/physical ill-treatment, harassment and bullying, along with powerful and compelling oral testimonials. Even accepting that the sample of respondents cannot be representative, these accounts are intolerable and indefensible.

There are indications here that hospitality workers love the people dimension of their jobs. They are passionate about people (colleagues, customers) and passionate about service. These passions need to be acknowledged and rewarded.

### **Theory and Frameworks Revisited in Brief**

In Section 3 a number of theories and frameworks were presented that could be used to make sense of the research findings of this study.

Looking at the fundamental aspects of the 'employment relationship', the imbalance of power is exaggerated in the hospitality sector by role differentiation and hierarchy.

A way to address this imbalance would be collectivisation within a trade union. However, unionisation rates are notoriously low in the hospitality sector.

The impact of union absence/avoidance is that workers are vulnerable to excessive exploitation.

## SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The over-emphasis of efficiency at the expense of equity and voice (a la Budd) stems from the fact that Egoist and Unitarist ideologies predominate amongst employers. Breaches of the psychological contract, by the employer, are frequent and the culture of 'employee churn', coupled with the lack of employee voice, and the absence of union protection, serve to mask such breaches. The importance and value of emotional labour is unrecognised and undervalued in its contribution to hospitality. More research is needed to explore the impact of emotional labour on customer satisfaction and return business. Finally, the findings of this research indicate that Hospitality does not deliver on the ILO features of Decent Work to a sufficient standard, with the exception perhaps of 'opportunities for work'.

### Recommendations:

**1. Employment Rights.** Employment rights represent a minimum standard and are put in place for valid reasons (e.g. Working Time Acts in relation to workplace health and safety). Compliance with the legal minimum is an issue. A targeted campaign on employment rights for hospitality workers by WRC, coupled with an education campaign targeted at employers and employees. There is evidence to suggest that tips are sometimes withheld in whole/part by employers. The National Minimum Wage (Protection of Employee Tips) Bill 2017, needs to be revisited. The WRC should instigate a targeted campaign of un-notified inspections of Hospitality establishments.

**2. Governance and Voice.** The voice of hospitality workers is very compelling and powerfully illustrates the issues from their perspective. There are indications from this research that hospitality workers want a voice. The 'employee' voice should be present on any government Task Force on Tourism and Hospitality. This research indicates worrying levels of non-reporting or mis-handling of reported ill-treatment cases, including worrying sentiments of 'we don't know where to go for help' and 'what's the point anyway'. There are indications of openness in hospitality workers to trade union membership, or at least knowing more about it. The trade union movement needs to act on this willingness. As part of this action, a national-level Joint Labour Committee/Sectoral Employment Order (JLC/SEO) should be established. This would ensure the development and maintenance of a set of minimum standards, and would offer workers an indirect voice in sector governance.

**3. HRM initiatives.** Initiatives should be introduced to make hospitality a more attractive career prospect. These initiatives should address work-life balance, pay & benefits, career and pay progression, voice, training, standards, rights, equality, respect, proper procedures, and competent management. A state-funded apprenticeship scheme should be introduced for hospitality. Higher education institutions relevant to hospitality should be working together to ensure effective delivery of relevant learning outcomes for the sector.

**4. Further Research.** A larger scale replication of this study. Comparative studies, using an adapted version of the survey designed by the author, are already under way in Scotland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, and Estonia. Case studies of 'good practice' would help to illustrate what can be achieved. A focus on non-Irish workers specifically would highlight their situation relative to nationals. Finally, research is needed on the post-pandemic return-to-work challenges faced by hospitality workers and employers.



## REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

### REFERENCES:

Budd, John W., "Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice" (2004)

### USEFUL LINKS:

- Citizens Information Service: Your Rights at Work  
[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment\\_rights\\_and\\_conditions/employment\\_rights\\_and\\_duties/employee\\_rights\\_and\\_entitlements.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_rights_and_conditions/employment_rights_and_duties/employee_rights_and_entitlements.html)
- Destination New South Wales <https://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Tourism-Business-Toolkit-VOL1-Chapter1.pdf>
- Expert Group on Future Skill Needs <http://www.skillsireland.ie/all-publications/2018/hospitality%20skills%20oversight%20group%20report%202018.html>
- Failte Ireland <https://www.failteireland.ie/>
- International Labour Organisation <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>
- Irish Hotels Federation <https://www.ihf.ie/>
- Irish Tourism Industry Confederation <https://www.itic.ie/reports/2018-reports/>
- Restaurants Association of Ireland <https://www.rai.ie/>
- SIPTU's Workers Rights Centre <https://www.siptu.ie/services/workersrightscentre/>
- Workplace Relations Commission [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie)

### APPENDIX 1:

Here is the link to the survey:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=hrHjE0bEq0qcbZq5u3aBbJx4RP1geqZMkwm0CoUNF8FUMzc2U0NVSFU3TFFORFZBUUxIQkc3UDFZUy4u>



If you would like to talk to me about anything in this report, please feel welcome to contact me: [Deirdre.curran@nuigalway.ie](mailto:Deirdre.curran@nuigalway.ie)

**"Your employees come first. And if you treat your employees right, guess what? Your customers come back, and that makes your shareholders happy. Start with employees and the rest follows from that." Herb Kelleher**