

Hospitality, tourism, and retail

Case studies

May 2022

As part of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry into **Hospitality, Tourism, and Retail**, the Citizen Engagement Team gathered views from people working in those sectors.

1. Engagement

1. The Citizens Engagement Team conducted an online survey looking into the issues that face people working in the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors across Wales. Respondents were asked questions covering the following five themes:

- Benefits of working in the sector;
- Working conditions and job security;
- Pay;
- Health and wellbeing; and
- Worker representation.

2. The Communications Service promoted the survey widely across all social media platforms with a targeted advertising campaign which ran for three weeks. 1,184 people clicked the link to the survey but only 13 people completed the survey.



3. The Citizen Engagement Team then sought to develop and expand the 13 responses into evidence that would support the Committee's inquiry and deliver on the objective of hearing from people working in the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors. Consequently, this paper contains 13 anonymised case studies of people working in the three sectors.

Participants

4. Participants came from across Wales including Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, Ceredigion, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan.

5. Six participants currently work in the hospitality sector, four in the tourism sector, and three in the retail sector.

6. Participants were aged between 16 and 65.

2. Engagement findings

Summary of the key themes

Participants like working in the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors as it allows them to work in their local community, gives flexibility to their life, and provides a social environment. However, participants identified the following as the main barriers to working across the sectors:

- Low pay and the rise in the cost of living.
- Pay not reflective of the workload.
- Pressured workloads from understaffing.
- Worker safety during the pandemic.
- Lack of secure contractual arrangements.
- Workers not heard or listened to.

3. Case studies

Hospitality sector case studies

1. Female from Cardiff

Hospitality is a good sector to work in and I enjoy the work. I have a good employer too that gives us lots of training opportunities. It makes a difference to how much you like your job if you can see a career in it.

Not all employers are the same, lots don't invest in their workers much, and they don't offer training or develop their skills. When you add that to irregular hours and not much pay for the work you do, it can be a difficult job to want to stay in. The hardest bit for me is how the hours affect my life outside work. It's hard to have a work-life balance with very irregular hours.

Things are getting so expensive now and the cost of living is going up, but our pay is so low that it doesn't cover the increases everywhere else.

A big problem at the moment is the pressure you feel under on a shift when you're understaffed. If one person calls in sick or they don't have enough people to cover the shift, you end up doing two or three people's workloads.

There's nothing I feel I can do about it, I don't know how to raise a problem, there's no union representation where I work. I wouldn't know where to start to get help.

2. Female from Cardiff

Working in hospitality really suits me. The flexibility generally allows me to work around other aspects of my life. It also allows me to work in my local community, so many jobs require you to commute or move, but I can stay and work in the community that I grew up in.

Working conditions could definitely be improved, poor management is an issue across the board really, management doesn't have enough respect or regard for the well-being of staff, they are more concerned about getting the shift covered than the person covering the shift. You never really feel secure in your job, like you're disposable. Staff are not really listened to if we have a work-related problem. And the younger workers are not treated fairly at all, it's easy for management to exploit them a bit.

Pay is also a problem, it is very low for the work and hours that we do. And with the rise in the cost of living, our pay looks smaller and smaller. The minimum wage is not a living wage!

Pressured workloads from understaffing are causing a lot of work-related health problems, it's very stressful. But then there's no wellbeing support from the employer, and when you get abuse from customers on top of that, it really gets you down.

3. Female from the Vale of Glamorgan

I really like working in the hospitality sector. I'm 58 and I find that it suits my stage in life. I love the social aspect of the work, getting to speak with customers and staff, and the flexibility it gives me lets me do other things in my life too.

I do worry about the lack of secure contracts, especially with so much economic uncertainty ahead. It's difficult when your contract isn't secure. It also doesn't help when pay, overall, is inconsistent across the sector. That's what I've experienced, different employers expect and pay differently. One might pay better but doesn't offer very consistent hours, the other always offers hours but the pay might be terrible. But across the board, pay doesn't reflect the workload.

I didn't feel safe working during the pandemic, especially as I'm older. You got a lot of abuse from customers too. Working conditions were terrible.

To be honest, I don't know what my employment rights are! I don't think that we workers are really listened to anyway. There's no information on what to do if you wanted to raise a problem. Nobody does anyway.

4. Male from Conwy

I like working in the hospitality sector, it gives me the freedom and flexibility that I want in my life. I have my own hospitality business in the community that I grew up in, and I provide employment to my community. One of the main benefits of working in hospitality is meeting new people from all walks of life.

As a business owner, I would like the hospitality sector to practice proper pricing for the services we provide, not a race to the bottom, that way you can pay proper wages. Paying the minimum wage should not be the norm for employees, whatever their age, especially when you also consider skilled employees. If we charged more we could pay more. Pay in the hospitality sector is too low and can't keep up with the rise in the cost of living.

The biggest barrier I face in attracting people to work in the hospitality sector is the status of the sector and what people think of it. And when you are employed in the sector you find that your skills are not appreciated and your pay doesn't reflect the work you do.

The customer is not always right, but they think that TripAdvisor gives them a right to destroy businesses. More than in any other sector, hospitality workers are expected to put up with abuse from customers.

Apart from increasing pay, the hospitality sector could give employees quick and easy access to a GP and dentist, better union representation, and should take care of its younger workers.

5. Female from Rhondda Cynon Taff

Hospitality offers me a clear career progression, it's one of the reasons that I like working in hospitality. I've gained valuable work experience through the opportunities that I've had. The hospitality sector is so understaffed at the moment that it's easier to progress as there are not a lot of people going for the jobs.

Hospitality doesn't provide a great work-life balance, the hours are long and unsociable. But saying that, the work is very sociable which can be good for your mental health. I find that I can be myself at work with my colleagues.

The downside to working in hospitality is that it's not a secure industry to work in, the contracts are not permanent and the hours are not secure or regular. So you can't really rely on it. Decent and fair contracts for workers, after they've completed a probation period, should be mandatory. Our contracts are very unfair, on zero-hours contracts you don't always take your holidays and you have to use them to subsidise your wages. I work in the lowest-paid sector. even though it's a physically demanding job with unsociable hours, the pay and contracts don't reflect that at all!

It's hard to know how to speak up about these problems because we don't really have any backing to raise work-related issues and we're not really listened to. I've seen violence from abusive customers, but you don't get any support or help.

6. Male from Monmouthshire

I like working in hospitality, there's good career progression for me. But there's no flexibility at all. The hours can be really bad, I've worked 100-hour weeks in the past because we were

understaffed and I didn't want to work the staff I did have to the bone. I think a lot of the understaffing comes from the lack of migrant workers, there's a gap that just hasn't been filled.

We need to sort out pay if we want to attract people into the hospitality sector. The pay doesn't reflect the workload or the rising cost of living. And, to keep staff we need to sort out how to protect them against abuse from customers and the impacts of irregular hours on the work-life balance.

Tourism sector

7. Male from Ceredigion

I want to live in the Welsh community that I grew up in. I speak Welsh and enjoy working in the Tourism sector. It gives me the flexibility I want and I like working for my employer. But there aren't really any other jobs in the community. Better jobs need to be brought into the area.

In tourism, visitors that come in get more of a say and much more respect than us local workers. Management doesn't have much regard for the workers, only the visitors. The industry needs to be made to fight for its staff and look after their wellbeing.

Pay is very low, there's no competition from other industries, so it's stagnant. Also, the cost of living is increasing only our pay isn't. And with no real career progression how can we get better pay?

The hardest part of the pandemic was the abuse from visitors. Their opinion was more important than ours. I don't see why we can't tell them to wear a mask in our place of work? I didn't feel safe working during the pandemic and I didn't feel protected by my employer. Staff in the tourist industry are not listened to, everything is about the visitors!

8. Males from Denbighshire

Tourism is a great sector to work in when there's adequate funding to support it. Being able to work locally, in my community, and in a job I enjoy is the main benefit of working in tourism for me. We pride ourselves on excellent customer service, which is a practice that should be seen more widely across the sector.

My biggest concern for the tourism sector is cuts to staffing. We've been told that our full-time jobs will end in September. That's completely down to funding. If the tourism sector is important to Wales it should be properly funded and protected.

We also need to consider that not all visitors to Wales access information online, this idea is unhelpful. Also, decisions are made by local government and Welsh Government who never meet the visitors or understand their needs, people working in tourism need to have more of a say about how the tourism is run. Tourist information centres used to be run by Visit Wales, but there doesn't seem to be any overall control of them now. We should look at the way Scotland runs its tourist industry.

Pay and working conditions are definitely an issue. If I was employed directly through the local council I would be paid at their rates, not minimum wages, this doesn't seem fair. And there's a lot of inconsistency with pay across the tourism sector as it is.

9. Female from Denbighshire

I get to work in the community that I grew up in, so it's great working in tourism. I'm proud to promote the area that I live in and to share it with visitors. I get to promote the heritage, culture, language, and vast array of things to see and do. I also enjoy working for my employer which is important.

I love working in tourism but I am concerned about my job security and the cuts to staffing coupled with the rising workloads. Welsh Government needs to promote tourism as a viable career opportunity. They also need to increase the wages, as many of us are low paid, to encourage people into the sector. Unfortunately, businesses are not able to increase pay for their staff due to the increase in the costs they have to cover, such as overheads, business rates, taxes, insurance, VAT, etc. If Welsh Government helped tourist businesses with business rates, taxes, etc. then they could increase wages. The pay we get doesn't reflect the workload, commitment, and pride that we have for our work.

10. Female from Newport

I enjoy working in tourism and for my employer, but career progression is not easy. It's a long-winded process within a complicated system, so gaining promotion is difficult, even though I have lots of experience from working in tourism for many years.

Pay is not good, but I get paid a higher rate for weekend and bank holiday work. This makes a difference but I don't think everyone gets it, I guess it depends on the employer and your contract. Overall, there's a lack of secure contractual arrangements for staff.

We have the lowest pay grades, they are so low that some people with families get income support too. Which says that the wage isn't enough to live on. We need decent and fair wages, especially as living is getting more and more expensive.

People don't realise how physically demanding working in tourism can be. You're standing all day, or the seating provided is inadequate so you can't sit properly. I've now got muscular-skeletal issues and I'm currently going to a physio to sort it out. You're not looked after health-wise, when thinking of the pandemic, I never felt safe working during covid.

I think that a lot of these problems are historical, we don't have any worker representation so without backing to raise work-related issues they'll never be sorted out.

Retail sector

11. Female from Blaenau Gwent.

I really like working in the retail sector. I'm 18, so having a clear career progression is important, and working in retail gives me that. I also like the flexibility the sector offers and my employer is good and I like working for them, so I can work the hours that suit me with an employer that I get on with. But, even though I like the flexibility with my hours, the hours are irregular and not secure.

I don't think that the pay is fair, it's too low and really doesn't reflect the work that we do. Employers don't give us enough benefits either.

Working during the pandemic was very stressful, I didn't feel safe because I was worried about catching it from other people. You got a lot of abuse from customers too, that was very hard. It makes it worse because workers are not really listened to, I don't think that I would get any backing to raise a work-related issue. You're on your own.

12. Male from Gwynedd

Working in retail means that I don't have to move out of my community for work. I can live in the area I grew up in where my language is used.

There's no job security in retail, staff are viewed as a controllable cost akin to wastage and shrinkage of stock. We need to scrap zero-hours contracts and return to part-time and full-time contracts. Workers need secure contractual arrangements. But employment law doesn't look after the employee, it's skewed to the employer. Staff need to be consulted so that changes

work for them too. But, retail unions are ineffective and management is dictatorial, so it's hard for staff to get their voice heard.

We need to make a change so that staff have a voice, like returning to employee committees or independent worker forums so that we have a say on things like wages and working conditions. We are deducted half an hour's pay for our meal break, but it's impossible for us to leave the premises to get food, eat it and get back in time. Not that long ago, an hour break was the norm.

Frankly, we're treated as commodities and disposable. Employers don't consider our health and wellbeing. Worker safety during the pandemic was very poor. Employers should not have been trusted to carry out the risk assessments, these should have been carried out by independent assessors and the outcome should have been legally binding on employers. External health and safety assessors should be the norm.

13. Female from Torfaen

I love my job and I love how it makes me feel. I love seeing customers and talking with them or helping them. My employer is great and there are real opportunities to gain valuable work experience for all ages. I just wish the Senedd saw the opportunities that the retail sector has to get the economy moving!

I don't think that the retail sector is thought of highly enough and has a pretty low status. I'm proud of what I do but I wish that the Government felt the same way too and invested more in retail.

Worker safety in the pandemic, that's a laugh! It was just about the Welsh Government closing us down, Everything was safe as houses then, but if it wasn't for the Tories thankfully paying my family's wages I don't know what would have happened.

Workers are not represented, heard, or listened to. Unions are a waste of space when you live with the dictatorship of the Welsh Government.

This week our hours were cut by another 20%, a lot of people will struggle to meet the rise in the cost of living when their hours are cut like that. Without guaranteed hours people won't know if they'll have enough money coming in. There's just no security. We know we'll be closed by September. We already have too few staff to cover illness. And with the pressured workloads from understaffing, people are bound to end up taking time off.