

Labour market intelligence for the North East visitor economy



Background

The visitor economy has faced significant challenges in recent years, with recruitment and retention issues becoming critical barriers to business sustainability and growth. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, resulting in a staffing crisis that intensified the need for targeted skills development. With ambitious plans set by Destination North East England (DNEE) to double the size of the visitor economy over the next decade, understanding the complex skills issues and emerging workforce challenges became more important than ever. Spanning diverse sectors such as accommodation, food and beverage services, and retail, the region’s visitor economy depends on a well-prepared workforce to meet future demands.

Our solutions

People 1st International was commissioned to provide strategic research and actionable insights to support DNEE’s vision for sustainable growth in the North East visitor economy. Our approach combined a robust methodology with targeted solutions to ensure actionable findings. Key steps included:

Identifying workforce and skills needs: We conducted comprehensive labour market intelligence research to gain a nuanced understanding of workforce challenges and skills gaps. This included:

- **Desk research:** Analysing national and regional datasets, including the Labour Force Survey, Census data, Working Futures projections and extensive vacancy data sources to provide context and foundational insights into workforce trends and needs within the North East.
- **Quantitative research:** Designing and distributing an online survey to employers across the visitor economy, gathering perspectives on skills shortages, recruitment barriers and training needs from 89 businesses. Data analysis using statistical software (SPSS) provided detailed segmentation and highlighted emerging themes.
- **Qualitative research:** Conducting in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, representing 96 businesses and 25,000 employees, to gather qualitative insights on specific workforce issues. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo software to identify key themes related to retention, skills gaps and training barriers.

Developing a strategic action plan: Based on the research findings, we developed targeted recommendations and a tailored action plan to address workforce shortages and skills gaps. This plan outlined actionable steps for building a resilient, skilled workforce that can support the North East visitor economy’s long-term growth.

Outcomes and impact

As the North East region embarks on an ambitious journey to double the size of its visitor economy in the next decade, a strategic focus on skills development and workforce planning will be crucial. The research offers a vital roadmap for tackling these challenges through targeted initiatives and collaborative efforts. By implementing the recommendations derived from this research, Destination North East England can build a resilient and skilled workforce capable of meeting the evolving demands of the visitor economy.