

Hospitality students “worse than they used to be.” What’s the problem and what can we do about it?

If there’s one thing that both providers and employers in the hospitality sector agree on, it’s the calibre of students entering the industry. Employers frequently complain about the lack of work ethic and negative attitudes of young people entering the trade. Around 40 per cent of providers also believe that the calibre of the students they teach is lower than 10 years ago.

What providers and employers don’t agree about is why. Employers may complain about providers not responding to their needs and their tendency to recruit disinterested students onto courses, use of out-of-date teaching practices and non-realistic working environments. Providers criticise employers for expecting too much of new recruits and for using work experience students as ‘cheap labour’, thereby turning students off before they’ve started. Whilst these are polarised views, they do show some of the difficulties faced on both sides.

But there are areas of good practice, where provision is meeting employers’ needs and where learners enter the industry with good knowledge, skills and attitudes. What makes provision work well in these cases? According to the lecturers in a recent study, things improved when they:

- forged relationships with employers and allowed them to tweak courses to their needs or develop new bespoke courses
- took time to understand employers’ businesses and needs
- gained current experience in the industry and used the opportunity to build commitment from employers, and
- up-dated their equipment to create realistic working environments, so they could deliver the skills that employers wanted (for example, through approaching suppliers about donating equipment or buying equipment jointly with employers).

Obviously, partnership working of this kind takes time to establish, but the view from providers is that it’s worth persevering. Providers who work together with employers to address needs and solve problems are more likely to produce employees who not only do the work but provide excellent customer service too.

Evidence source

Lowings, A. (2006) It never *used* to be like this: an analysis of the views of college lecturers. People
1st www.people1st.co.uk/research