



# Why hospitality should be flexing its most powerful asset

A study into flexible working trends in 2023



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## Foreword

As attitudes to work have evolved over the last few years, the UK labour market is seeing unprecedented demand for more flexible ways of working. From office workers to hospitality staff, the one thing, outside of pay, which consistently hits the top of people's agenda is flexibility.

How then, can operators navigate this uncertain world - when the rota only fits one way and consistency of product and service remains paramount? How do you juggle the unstoppable force of market conditions with a desire to deliver for your customers? In this paper, we examine some of those issues.

## Methodology

An online survey with 280 current and recent hospitality workers was conducted in January 2023 by KAM plus industry insights from public sources.

# 01

## Current staffing situation



## 01 Current staffing situation

# In 2023, there are still 180,000 vacancies in hospitality

# 35%

of staff leavers left hospitality because of anti-social hours

# 64%

couldn't deliver the service they wanted due to understaffing

# 43%

said understaffing made them look elsewhere for work

In the wake of the staffing difficulties caused by Brexit and Covid-19, staff retention has emerged as a key challenge. Keeping a happy, functioning team of staff is now as much of an issue for operators as attraction and recruitment, with the ongoing impact of understaffing making employee churn all the more likely.

When speaking with operators, the picture is clear - 140% staff turnover (per year) is now viewed as normal. With loyalty amongst staff at all time low levels, the return on investment in team is as poor now as it has ever been.

Part of the problem is the exodus of staff after the pandemic - the industry has to find a way of attracting more people into roles

Surveyed staff member

# 02

## What workers really want

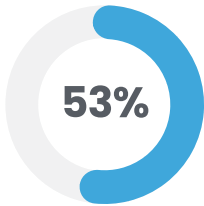


## 02 What workers really want

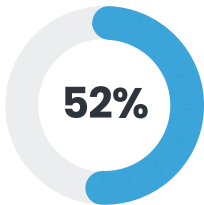
Increasingly, employment trends are being shaped by what employees want from their work-life, not how operators want to staff their businesses.

Work-life balance and flexibility is now a critical consideration for people when choosing where to work. When asked, 60% of workers thought that hospitality work was **inflexible**, which is a surprising statistic given the use of zero hours contracts in the sector. Whilst many operators have moved on from the days of "staff wanted. Must work all weekends and be around at Xmas", there is still a way to go.

### Candidate priority for new roles



Pay and benefits



Work-life balance



Flexibility of hours/days

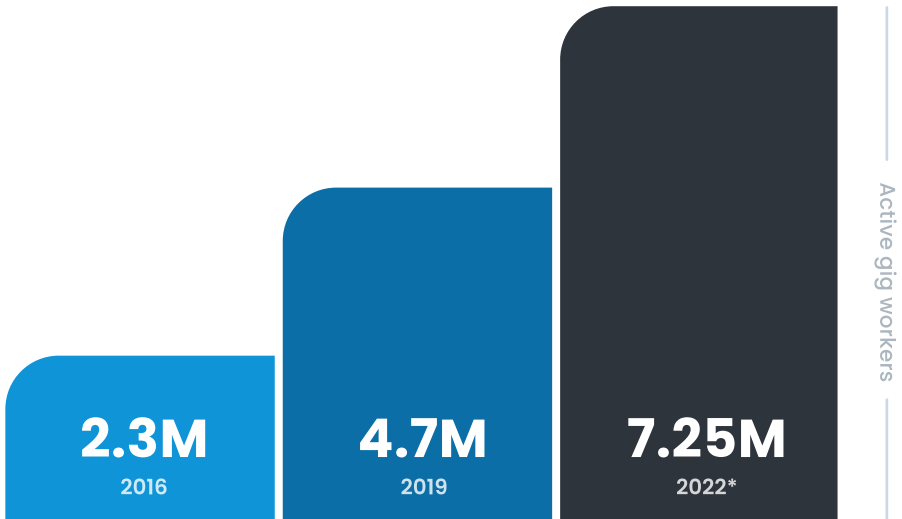


## 02 What workers really want

### A shift in attitudes

As Covid gave people a break from work, they had more time with their families and a chance to pursue hobbies and side projects. That, added to a period of increased self reflection for a lot of people, meant the desire for a better work-life balance grew.

An interesting barometer for this is the rise of the gig economy.



\*Based on employment and gig economy increase from 2016-2019



Work-life balance is important so I'm able to have time to take care of myself physically and mentally.

Surveyed staff member

# 03

## Why flexibility matters





### 03 Why flexibility matters

## Not just a gen Z thing

Our research showed that workers are attracted to flexible working to help them manage other life commitments and choices - young children, caring for older parents, studying and time for other jobs, hobbies and interests.

There is no cookie cutter “type” who wants to work in this way. Gig workers and temps are all now outdated labels of this cross section of the labour force. The idea that, for (likely) minimum wage, a staff member owes any kind of commitment is being dismissed by staff in their droves. The employer-employee relationship is being rewritten.

**Hospitality employees want choice as well**

This isn't just about flexible hours. For many, it's about not being tied down to one site or to one type of role

**60%**

want easy access to top up hours

**52%**

would like to work multiple roles

**47%**

would like to work across multiple locations

# Flexibility appeals to a broad church



I'm retired now and try to keep in reasonable shape. The ability to fit in a swimming session, long walk or shopping expedition into the day combined with my other activities and the chance to add a little extra income to my pension is very handy.

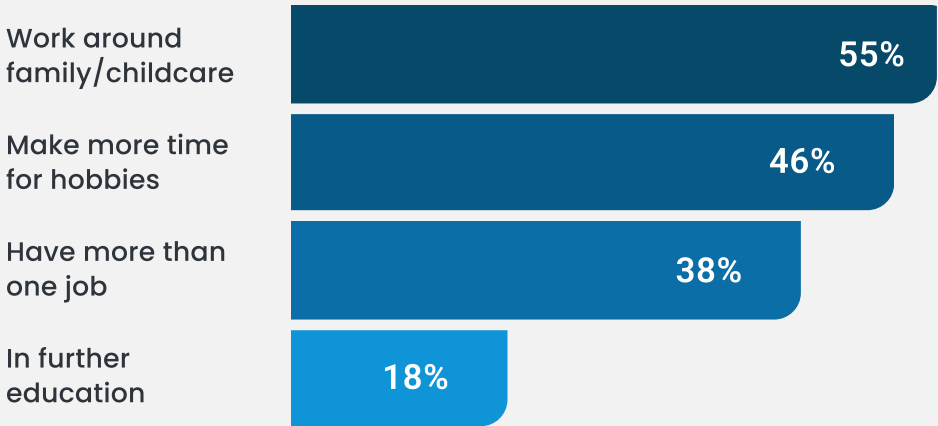
Surveyed staff member

In UKHospitality issue 12 of Future Shock, they addressed the relationship between the hospitality staffing crisis and the importance of appealing to a wide labour market of all demographics. UKHospitality CEO, Kate Nicholls OBE, said:

“With hospitality continuing to deal with staffing challenges, it’s essential that businesses do all they can to appeal to everyone in the job markets.”

### 03 Why flexibility matters

## There is no “typical” flexible worker



Hospitality workers when asked why access to flexible working opportunities is important to them

# 33%

Say flexibility is even more important since the cost of living crisis



# 04

## The dilemma for operators



## 04 The dilemma for operators

### The rota only fits one way

*"If we offer total flexibility, everyone will want it.."*

Behind this intentionally glib comment from an operator is a real concern. If you offer unrestricted flexibility; and total choice of when and where staff work (both sites and area of the business) you will create voids. Weekend shifts will go unfilled, some sites will be more popular than others and some areas of the business will be underserved.

There's the administrative burden too. How can you make the rota work? How can you juggle so much movement? There are lots of issues to consider.

# 60%

**of staff don't believe that the industry allows them to work flexibly**



**I have a family and 3 kids to look after.**

**I would like to work in a flexible working environment so I can balance my family life.**

Surveyed staff member

### Our solution: “lean in” to flexibility

#### Core

80–90%+ of workforce

Nurturing, development,  
progression

Higher/longer term  
commitment

Delivered via your core  
scheduling tech

#### Flex

10–20% of workforce

No commitments.  
Absolute flexibility

Can move (relatively)  
freely between sites

Delivered via a separate  
tech platform

One of the surprising findings of our research was that 60% of staff believe the hospitality sector to be inflexible. The zero hours contract was obviously designed to provide that flexibility, but ultimately, there's a perception amongst staff that this kind of flexibility is a one way street.

Imagine, in a city where you have five sites, having a flexible team of 100 skilled staff who could move across any site? When deployed as a positive complement to a loyal core team, a liquid workforce like this is invaluable. Not only does it allow you to engage with a wider talent pool looking for flexibility, but it enables you to be much more reactive than when relying on traditional teams alone.

# 05

## The upside of embracing flexibility



## 05 The upside of embracing flexibility

### Accessing a wider talent pool

When operators advertise a traditional role, they're missing out on a significant proportion of the workforce. That's because the flexibility, variety and mobility that staff want is hard to come by in many organisations.

By tapping into a wider talent pool and proactively embracing flexibility, operators can reach a diverse, skilled and currently out of reach talent pool.

“Flexible working means I can travel around London and meet and visit different places and make some cash doing what I love, serving people.

Surveyed staff member

# 43%

Say more flexibility would encourage them to work for an organisation.





### Increase profitability

With a plug and play liquid workforce, multi-site operators can react to customer demand, seasonality and the inevitable ebb and flow of teams in a far more reactive way. By avoiding over and understaffing in equal measure, profitability inevitably rises.

# 64%

**believe that understaffing reduces their own service quality.**

### Improve morale; reduce churn

Embracing flexibility benefits operators by increasing retention and productivity, improving recruitment and reducing vacancies. By providing site managers with a liquid workforce, operators can take pressure off core teams.



I'd love employers to understand that flexible working is the way forward and has a part to play. It can boost overall 'workplace morale' when used correctly and understood. Flexible workers can make a significant noteworthy contribution.

Surveyed staff member

# limber can help you build, manage and share flexible teams

## Your flexible team



**Sarah Austin**

BAR SUPERVISOR



**Joe Lynch**

BAR MANAGER



**Lucy Watson**

WAITRESS



**Allie Steward**

BARTENDER



**Cameron Williams**

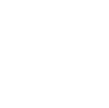
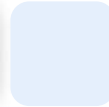
WAITER



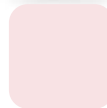
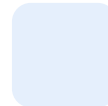
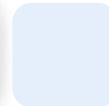
**Jack Mitchell**

WAITER

## Site 1



## Site 2



How we can help

## Specialists in working with multi-site hospitality operators

Our mission is to help people live a happy, flexible and varied work-life and to help operators build, share and manage that flexible talent in the best way possible.

Through our core product, limber classic, and our enterprise white label platform, we connect some of the country's biggest hospitality businesses with 85,000+ people who are looking to work a new, flexible, way.



ALL·BAR·ONE



GOURMET  
BURGER  
KITCHEN

O'Neill's





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