



Caring for people

'Care to Make a Difference'

How looking after our people can transform tourism and hospitality and help it ride the current perfect storm

Introduction, by Andrea Nicholas, chief executive of Green Tourism

Our tourism and hospitality sectors - which are vital parts of the wider economy - have endured two years of unprecedented challenges. They have had to contend with staff shortages and low employee retention, disrupted supply chains, spiralling energy costs, Covid-19 and Brexit. These issues have all come together to create a perfect storm for the tourism and hospitality sectors in Scotland, and across the UK and many businesses still feel uncertain about their future.

We're calling on the industry to come together to try to improve the situation for everyone - 'Care to Make a Difference'.

I, along with many colleagues across tourism, believe one way of addressing the challenges is for businesses to place an emphasis on really caring for their people. Caring for people is a 'strategic pillar' for [Green Tourism](#), along with working with places and our planet. We've spoken to leading members of the tourism and hospitality sectors to find out how they are caring for their people and how this is making a difference to their own businesses and the industry as a whole.

Caring for people, for example by paying the real Living Wage – we became a Living Wage Accredited employer at Green Tourism in 2021 - and generally treating staff well, along with a long-term focus on sustainability, can make a massive difference to tourism and hospitality and help it ride the current storm.

Green Tourism - along with peers - is calling on the industry to 'Care to Make a Difference'. It is making the following call to action....

Call to action

We're calling on tourism and hospitality businesses to 'Care to Make a Difference' by:

- Paying staff well – consider paying the real Living Wage which currently stands at £9.90 and become accredited by Living Wage Scotland.
- Offering security, flexibility and value-added benefits to employees e.g. long-term contracts; flexible working hours; time off to spend with family and friends.
- Offering mentoring and training to upskill the existing workforce.
- Focusing on the mental health and wellbeing of all colleagues.
- Taking a long-term approach to sustainability and 'green' matters to protect the world for future generations.

Introducing such measures is good for businesses in helping them attract and retrain staff to tackle the issue of a shortage of skilled people and is good for employees.

This call to action is led by Andrea Nicholas, chief executive of Green Tourism, and backed by:

- Marc Crothall, chief executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance
- Anna Hirvonen, Living Wage Scotland accreditation officer
- Calum Ross, owner of Loch Melfort Hotel, Chair of UK Hospitality Scotland, board member of Scottish Tourism Alliance, Argyll & the Isles Tourism Co-operative, Highlands & Islands Tourism Awards and a member of University of the Highlands & Islands Court.
- Marina Huggett, chair of Achnagairn Estate, board of Hospitality Industry Trust, runs Tourism Excellence Consultancy, director of Highlands and Islands Tourism Awards, board of Visit Inverness Loch Ness.

Why we need to care for our people – voices from across the industry -

Marc Crothall, chief executive, Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA)

Marc warns that **recruitment** is a major issue for the tourism industry for a variety of reasons, including Covid-19 and Brexit, as well as perceptions of what it is like to work in the sector.

He says: "The bottom line and harsh reality is there's just not a big enough pool of people to fill all the roles we have in Scotland. Our main ask of the UK Government is to revisit the immigration policy to provide the opportunity for people from European nations to return to employment in Scotland, maybe on shorter visas. We need such people as skilled chefs – being a chef isn't something that can be taught in six weeks. We're an international industry and we're competing with other sectors that are looking for staff."

While such government intervention is required, Marc explains that there are many initiatives in place that are designed to tackle the challenge of recruitment and wider issues, for example through its recovery programme.

These include:

The UK-wide campaign Hospitality Rising that is seeking to raise about £5 million to help change the perception of working in the sector and has the backing of UK Hospitality. Marc says: “It’s asking for all businesses to sign up to support the campaign that is forward-thinking in terms of its marketing. The model is simple – businesses are asked to give £10 per employee as a contribution.”

In Scotland, a campaign was launched in the summer as part of Covid recovery initiative to encourage people to choose a career in Scotland’s valued tourism and hospitality industry. The initiative, funded by the Scottish Government and developed in conjunction with the sector, with lead partner the Scottish Tourism Alliance. Its message is ‘whatever you love doing, there’s a job in hospitality for you’. Marc says: “It doesn’t matter what age you are, but if you like going to cocktail bars or restaurants, or cooking at home, there are jobs out there that allow you to do what you love. We’re really bad at presenting our industry as a fun industry. We need to do more of that.”

Marc says it’s also necessary to better explain to educators and parents the range of careers that are available in tourism and hospitality. “There are more jobs in our sector than working behind a bar. There isn’t necessarily the culture of long shifts, and you can accelerate really quickly on your career path. There’s a lack of understanding of jobs that exist across the sector, including such things as digital marketing roles.”

There is also the Hoteliers’ Charter initiative which was launched a few months ago to raise the profile of the industry and to advocate working in hotels as a great career choice. Marc says: “We’re asking hotel managers to embrace such things as sustainability and fair work and demonstrate their commitment. When they sign-up their hotel goes onto a map and becomes visible to local colleges and schools who can see those organisations that are there to support and help young people.”

In terms of the **fair work agenda**, Marc believes businesses must realise it’s not all about pay. “Recent research recently by Skills Development Scotland showed there is potentially a lack of understanding about what fair work means. Business must look at wider employee benefits. One thing Covid has done has made businesses more responsive to offering better terms of employment, more flexibility and higher rates of pay. We have to as in industry be more accommodating of different types of work patterns.”

Part of the Covid recovery programme is looking at how to upskill the current workforce. Marc points to the launch in December of the second round of a tourism and hospitality management supervisory management and leadership programme, funded by the Scottish Government, as an example of what is being done in this area. He explains: “Given the fact we have a shrunken workforce; we need to upskill.”

Mental health and wellbeing have become bigger issues, particularly with the impact of the uncertainty around Covid-19 and the added pressures this has brought. Marc says: “On

mental health, we have refreshed a paper that signposts people to professional help and how business leaders and managers can recognise when people are in distress.”

Some tourism and hospitality businesses have decided to close their doors for certain days of the week or give staff time off over the festive season in recognition of their hard work and the stressful situation. Marc says: “Hats off to those who have shut their doors for a few days a week. They’re doing what they can to protect the people they have, despite customer demand and need to service debts. There’s a need to balance looking after the welfare of people while trying to make a profit.”

On **sustainability and green tourism**, Marc believes the industry is responding in a positive way and wants to ‘do the right thing’. He adds: “The future generations of our workforce will look to businesses that are able to demonstrate their green credentials and their commitment to the green agenda. I haven’t come across any employer who doesn’t believe that’s the case.”

<https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk>

Anna Hirvonen, Living Wage Scotland accreditation officer

Living Wage Scotland aims to increase the number of employees in Scotland who receive the real Living Wage – currently £9.90. Living Wage accreditation formally recognises and celebrates employers who choose to go further than the government minimum. Currently there are over 2400 Living Wage accredited employers in Scotland who have collectively uplifted more than 52,000 workers to the real Living Wage.

Living Wage Scotland is working closely with the tourism and hospitality industries to encourage more businesses to become Living Wage accredited. It has a Hospitality Steering Group comprised of a diverse range of firms from across Scotland including hotels, bars, student venues, coffee roasters and comedy clubs.

Anna says: “There are many benefits to becoming Living Wage accredited. It can help address recruitment challenges and increase the positive profile of careers in hospitality. It’s also a signal of investment in employee wellbeing, including mental health, and appeals to ethical consumers.

Benefits listed by Living Wage Scotland include:

- Attracting talent
- Enhanced company reputation
- Improved staff retention Increased productivity Differentiate from industry peers
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Signal of social responsibility

Anna says more businesses in hospitality and tourism have become accredited since it began focusing on the industry in April 2018. She adds: “Perhaps even more significant is

that we have seen continued growth since the beginning of the pandemic, despite hospitality being one of the hardest hit industries in the country.”

In September 2021, Living Wage Scotland celebrated reaching a milestone of 100 accredited Hospitality employers in Scotland. It has had some significant employers join its network in the last few months, including Itison, Innis & Gunn, Manorview Hotels and Leisure Group and Camera Obscura. More than 80 employers have joined its hospitality network since the first lockdown.

Anna says: “We have been encouraged by the resilience, agility and determination of growing our hospitality network however, we continue to see the impact of Brexit and Covid on recruitment and retention of staff as well as food supply chains. Attracting new talent remains top of the industry’s priority list and the real Living Wage can play a key role in helping businesses aid their recovery.”

Anna concludes: “At its core, the Living Wage movement is about people: their lives, their families and their futures.

“Payment of the real Living Wage is a strong signal of social responsibility and helps employees feel valued and appreciated. The Living Wage movement is inseparable from the movement for a liveable planet and employers have an opportunity to lead the way toward a future that puts people and planet at its heart by committing to pay workers a real Living Wage as part of a just climate agenda.”

<https://scottishlivingwage.org/>

Marina Huggett, Achnagairn Estate (a five-star, exclusive use venue), Inverness

Marina Huggett is passionate about training and development, describing it as “the secret to success”. She says: “We have always been conscious that our staff are our biggest assets at Achnagairn. We’re paid more than the minimum and we’ve just signed up to be an accredited Living Wage Employer - and try to offer fixed hour contracts wherever possible to give people regular hours. We also try to add value with other benefits for staff. “

The staff at Achnagairn are encouraged to focus on self-development and several have been on leadership and management programmes and received scholarships through the Hospitality Industry Trust. A few years ago, Marina took her core team on a learning journey to London to develop their understanding of service and business excellence. This involved such things as a tour of the Ritz Hotel, a Michelin star meal and a stay in a five-star hotel. She is hoping to repeat the trip again very soon, restrictions permitting.

Marina says: “Community involvement is also very important for us. The majority of our staff live within about a 10-mile radius of the business because we are so rural. We do things like firework displays to raise money for local primary school – many of our staff have children or grandchildren at the school. We try to use local suppliers. We source all of our beds from Blindcraft in Inverness and our toiletries are from Ness Soaps, both social enterprises.”

She explains that looking after the team at Achnagairn is more important now than ever. There are monthly one-to-one chats to ensure people are happy and comfortable in their roles and there are team meetings every week. Because of staff shortages and the level of demand when restrictions eased in 2021, staff were all given a bonus in their salary in the summer in recognition of their hard work. “The combination of last-minute new business and pent-up demand exaggerated the staffing shortage. I don’t think any of us have put in a season that’s been so busy,” says Marina. “And we’ve always had a policy not to take a booking at Christmas because we feel it’s really important to give our staff that time with their families. We’ve never opened at Christmas in the 14 years we’ve been in business. “

Achnagairn also takes sustainability very seriously. It has installed a solar panel system for energy. It has had a Zero Waste Scotland report done and is now looking at its recommendations. For example, there is a burn on-site that has potential to create power from the water and it is exploring electric vehicles and charging points on the estate. “Sustainability is a core part of our future business planning,” explains Marina. “It’s the little things you do that make a difference. If everyone takes baby steps it helps enormously. Every week when we sit down for our management meetings and ask for suggestions and ideas, for example on how we can improve from a sustainability point of view.”

<https://www.perfect-manors.com/achnagairn-estate/>

Calum Ross, owner of Loch Melfort Hotel (a four-star Country House Hotel, near Oban)

Calum Ross believes that more has to be done to support the mental wellbeing of people in hospitality and tourism. “Mental wellbeing still seems to have a stigma attached to it where both employees and employers don’t seem to want to talk about it enough,” he says. “We’re trying to address this as an industry, through UK Hospitality, the Scottish Tourism Alliance, initiatives like “Hospitality Health” and at a business level. But I don’t think the industry’s owners, managers and supervisors are equipped to recognise and deal with the signs of mental health issues.”

One way that Calum has supported his staff wellbeing is to give them more time off work following a stressful time. His hotel normally closes for three weeks before Christmas, opens for two weeks over the festive period and closes again for three weeks in January. This winter he and his management team took the decision to close at the end of November 2021 and didn’t re-open again until 4 February 2022 to give everyone an extended break and time to spend with friends and family, despite the costs for the business.

Calum says: “We have a core team about of 25 employees we retain all year and about 15 people we recruit seasonally. By autumn of 2021, every single member of the core team – including me – felt totally exhausted mentally and physically from the effort it had taken to run the business over the last couple of years. The key driver for closing for longer was the recognition that people needed that two-month period away from work and not to have to gear back up to the two-week festive period. Without question, everyone in the team was happy about that decision. I own the business with my wife Rachel, and we felt it was the right thing to do. We’re in a remote rural environment, most of staff come from villages

near us or live in, and it's more important than ever to hold onto employees by treating them well."

Loch Melfort has always believed in caring for its staff and paid the Living Wage for most of last year, becoming a Living Wage Accredited employer in November. It also decided to introduce a 10% discretionary service charge in its restaurant and bar for the first time in 2021 to help compensate for reduced tips being received by staff with fewer people carrying cash because of Covid-19. Calum says: "We had no negative reaction to this from a customer point of view - every penny is passed on to the team and it paid out phenomenal amounts of money to them. Our people work really hard providing great service and amazing customer experiences and should be rewarded by us (their employer) and our customers."

The hotel is also investing in sustainability. It recently installed a biomass heating and hot water system saving 76 tonnes of carbon every year and installed two new sedum roofs last year.

<https://www.lochmelfort.co.uk>

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