



Manpower Update Report

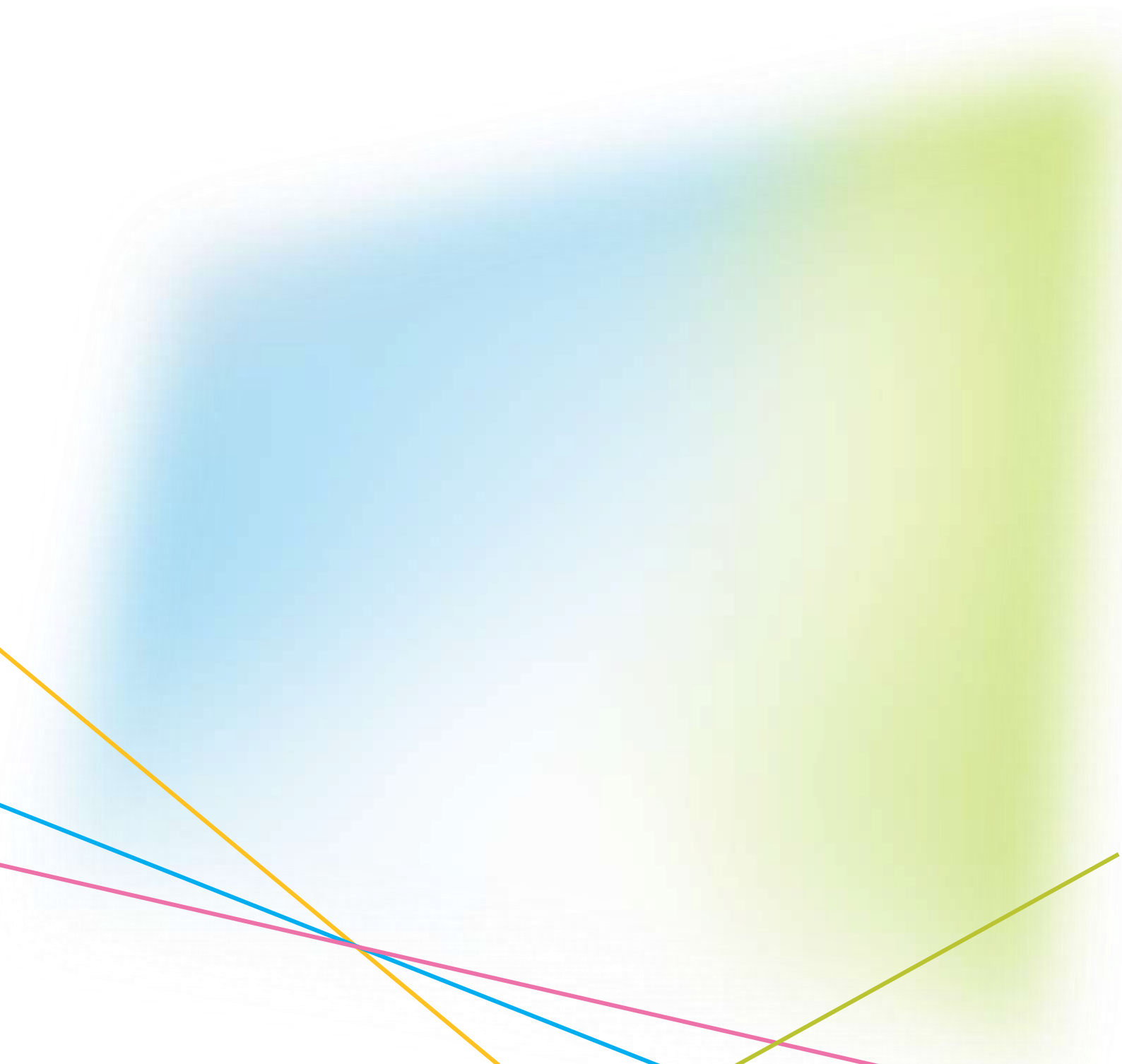
Hotel Industry

2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism Training Board (HOTB) would like to express its gratitude to the members of the focus group for their valuable insights on the manpower situation of the hotel industry. The perspectives shared by focus group members, alongside the insights from HOTB members and key recruitment platforms, have been instrumental in shaping the findings presented in this report.



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Introduction

Background

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism Training Board (HOTB) of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) is responsible for determining manpower demand of the industry, assessing whether the manpower supply matches manpower demand, and recommending the development of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) to meet the assessed training needs.

To better capture workforce dynamics, HOTB conducts a comprehensive quantitative manpower survey every four years, complemented by two manpower updates focused on qualitative insights. The latest full manpower survey for the hotel industry was completed in 2022, with the first manpower update delivered in 2025 and the second in 2026, to capture emerging developments in the industry.

This manpower update report consists of:

(a) insights from a focus group meeting held on 23 April 2026 to collect views from industry experts on the latest industry developments, workforce demand, recruitment difficulties, training needs, and recommended measures to address the challenges the industry faces; and

(b) desk research and analysis of recruitment information obtained from major recruitment platforms covering the period from April 2025 to March 2026.

Objectives

The objectives of this manpower update report of the hotel industry are:

- (i) to examine the latest trends and developments in the industry;
- (ii) to identify the job market situation and training needs;
- (iii) to identify the recruitment challenges; and
- (iv) to recommend measures to meet the training needs.

Methodology

Overview

This manpower update report adopts a qualitative approach to capture recent developments in the hotel industry through a focus group meeting, supplemented by desk research analysing recruitment trends and skill requirements.

Focus Group Meeting

The focus group meeting was conducted on 23 April 2026 and topics discussed were supported by the Working Party on Manpower Survey of the Hotel Industry under the HOTB. To gather comprehensive industry insights, the focus group comprised representatives from hotels of different scales. They shared their views on business outlook, manpower challenges, workforce structure, recruitment practices and emerging skill requirements. The insights gathered formed a qualitative basis for analysing the current manpower situation, and the meeting was recorded and transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis.

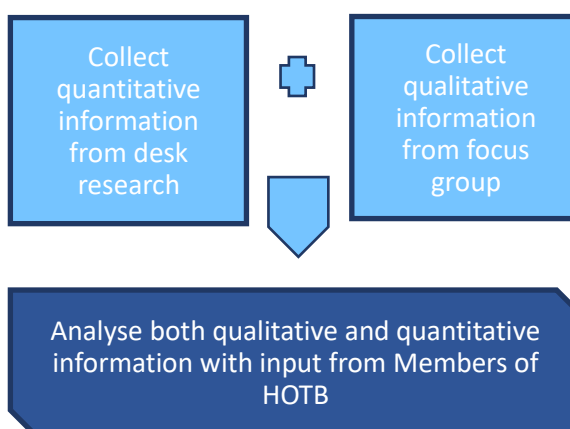
Desk Research

Manpower information covering the period between April 2025 and March 2026 was collected through desk research. An employment information system was developed to capture the relevant

recruitment data from major online recruitment portals. A total of 12,954 recruitment records were collected during the research period and served as indicative information of the job market trend. The list of related companies under the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification was mapped to remove duplicated records.

Data Analysis

The analysis consists of three steps:



After the above qualitative and quantitative analysis, the findings and recommendations were augmented and endorsed by the HOTB.

Limitations

Different from the extensive quantitative manpower survey performed in 2022, this update report aims to discover the emerging themes in the manpower development of the industry. The employment trends and behaviour, recruitment difficulties, insights and observations from the stakeholders' experience were captured through this focus group and desk research. While the update report has adopted the qualitative approach of focus group discussion which covered a controlled selection of stakeholders, it might not be generalised to the entire population. Desk research that gathered information of job vacancies from advertisements in major recruitment websites also might not be exhaustive without reference to any historical data, those were used as reference supplementary to the observations of the focus group.

Findings

Factors Affecting the Industry Development

Shift in Market Demand

The industry is experiencing a noticeable shift in market demand. Traditional sources of stable business, such as long-haul travellers and corporate clients associated with large-scale events, have softened. Demand is currently driven by regional visitors, which results in shortened booking lead times and increased business volatility. Demand has become increasingly short-term in nature, with more last-minute bookings reducing planning visibility and requiring faster operational response. Conversely, large-scale city events, such as international sports competitions and music concerts, continue to demonstrate a positive impact by driving temporary surges in demand for hotels in the immediate vicinity. This overall shift has created a more unpredictable operating environment, requiring greater agility in resource allocation and workforce deployment.

Evolution of Service Expectations

Guest preferences have shifted significantly from traditional, formal service etiquette. Rather than adhering to rigid service protocols, modern travellers,

particularly younger demographics and those aged between 30 and 55, increasingly prioritise overall value and authentic, engaging interactions with staff. This evolving definition of quality hospitality requires employees on the frontline to possess high level of interpersonal adaptability. Consequently, delivering this highly interactive level of service presents a distinct operational challenge, especially when integrating newer entrants who may be less accustomed to communicating directly in person.

Growth of Experience-driven Services

A market willingness to allocate higher expenditure towards services that focus on unique experiences has been identified. Nowadays, guests are actively seeking premium components during their stays, such as upgraded dining options and wellness facilities. This trend is most pronounced in the substantial growth of the family travel segment, which has driven a rigid demand for tailored "family experience" (Famex) offerings. To capture this high yield market, hotels are required to diversify their service portfolios and deploy a workforce capable of going beyond standard hospitality duties. This includes

hiring personnel specifically to design, manage, and facilitate bespoke recreational activities and programmes for children within the property.

Integration of Technology and AI

Digital tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are actively reshaping operational workflows. Generative AI and data analytics are increasingly used to process complex business data, optimise revenue management, and automate correspondence. While technology reduces the turnaround time for administrative tasks, it also prompts a restructuring of roles within the back office, requiring employees to increase efficiency by familiarising themselves with various digital platforms.

Operational Cost Constraints

The operating environment in Hong Kong continues to be characterised by high costs. Unlike some neighbouring regions where manpower can be easily scaled up to maintain service levels, hotels in Hong Kong must carefully balance rising operational expenses with ongoing labour shortages, placing a premium on workforce efficiency.

Manpower Demand

Labour Shortage and Aging Workforce

The shortage of manpower extends beyond frontline roles, affecting operations across the front office, engineering departments, and administrative divisions. To sustain daily operations, the industry increasingly relies on extending the working age of existing employees, with casual labour deployments sometimes involving personnel aged 65 or above.

Flexible Workforce Models

Hotels continue to rely on a mix of staff working full-time, part-time, and on a casual basis to navigate seasonal fluctuations. The recent amendments to the continuous contract requirement under the Employment Ordinance have prompted employers to review their staffing models. Balancing statutory compliance, operational costs, and the need for scheduling flexibility remains a complex administrative challenge.

Organisational Restructuring and Job Consolidation

Job roles are becoming more integrated. The use of digital tools has enabled the consolidation of duties, meaning an employee may now handle a mix of customer relations, content creation, and basic data analysis rather than being confined to limited responsibilities. However, developing a multi-skilled workforce requires careful management, as employees expect clear career progression and appropriate remuneration when taking on broader responsibilities.

Internal Competition and Title Adjustments

Competition for talent within the local hospitality sector is fierce. Hotels frequently update their fringe benefits to attract staff, causing ripple effects across the industry. To satisfy the workforce's expectation for rapid career advancement, the trend of "title inflation" is observed within the sector. Complex job titles and hierarchical layers are created primarily to offer promotional milestones and retain personnel.

Desk Research

Out of the relevant recruitment advertisements captured in the desk research, the top five principal jobs with the

highest number of recruitment advertisements were identified:

Principal Jobs		
	2025-26	2024-25
1	Guest Service Officer/Guest Service Agent; Front Desk Agent; Guest Relations Officer; Welcome Host; Executive Floor Agent; Business Centre Officer 5.6%	Room Attendant; Room Services Butler; Floor Attendant; Housekeeping Clerk; Order-Taker 5.3%
2	Room Attendant; Room Services Butler; Floor Attendant; Housekeeping Clerk; Order-Taker 5.0%	Steward; Cleaner; Dishwasher 4.8%
3	Waiter/Waitress; Server; Restaurant Receptionist 4.1%	Waiter/Waitress; Server; Restaurant Receptionist 4.7%
4	Captain; Restaurant Supervisor 3.7%	Captain; Restaurant Supervisor 4.2%

Principal Jobs	
2025-26	2024-25
5 Steward; Cleaner; Dishwasher 2.9%	Front Desk Agent; Front Office Clerk / Receptionist; Guest Relations Officer; Car Park Attendant 3.2%

The data indicates a noticeable shift in recruitment patterns, with Guest Service Officer-related roles rising to the top position in 2026. This reflects increasing manpower demand at the front office, where direct interaction with guests remains essential to daily operations. The prominence of these roles may be associated with the evolving expectations of guests, which place greater emphasis on personalised service and effective communication. At the same time, the relatively high turnover in customer-facing positions suggests a continuous need for replenishment of manpower. In comparison with 2024, the changes in ranking also indicate a shift in operational pressure from back-of-house functions towards frontline roles. This highlights the growing importance of service delivery capability, particularly in managing guest interactions within a dynamic operating environment.

Training Needs

Language Proficiency and Communication Skills

Effective communication remains a fundamental requirement across all hotel operations. However, the industry observes that candidates possessing strong language capabilities frequently pursue opportunities in other trades and industries. This dynamic creates a disparity in the language proficiency of new entrants. Relevant training programmes must reinforce practical language skills to ensure staff can communicate clearly and professionally with a diverse base of international and regional guests.

Data Security and Analytical Application of AI

The application of AI is shifting from basic tasks to complex functions, such as analysing booking channels and interpreting performance metrics. Training must evolve from teaching basic software usage to developing data validation skills. Employees need critical thinking to assess the accuracy of reports generated by AI. Equally important is comprehensive training on data security, ensuring staff understand the boundaries of handling operational or customer data on digital platforms.

Applied Communication and Interpersonal Resilience

A gap exists between the newer entrants, who prefer digital platforms for communication, and the direct interaction that hospitality operations require. Additionally, there is a growing trend of individuals relying on personality profiling (such as MBTI) when making career choices. Without giving it a try, they conclude from the results that they are not suitable for guest handling roles. Training should provide supportive practice based on real scenarios in handling complaints and recovering service failures. Building confidence in communicating verbally is essential to help individuals navigate stressful situations and stretch beyond their preferred styles of communication.

Supervisory Skills for Middle Management

As the workforce demographics change, middle management and supervisors require updated leadership skills. Managing a mix of older-generation workers, a growing number of part-time staff, and young professionals with different career expectations is challenging. Supervisors need targeted training in mentorship, expectation management, and employee engagement techniques to effectively lead their teams in the current manpower landscape.

Practical Application of ESG Principles

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria are increasingly embedded in hotel operations. While the awareness of ESG is strong, there is a distinct training need regarding its implementation. Training programmes should incorporate an analysis of costs and benefits, helping future professionals understand how to design and execute sustainability initiatives that are both environmentally responsible and financially viable within a daily operational context.

Recruitment Challenges

Declining Industry Attractiveness

The hotel sector continues to face substantial difficulties in attracting new graduates. General perceptions regarding irregular working hours, demanding physical environments, and continuous pressure from guests often discourage potential candidates from entering the industry. These perceptions are frequently reinforced by parental influence, particularly among younger individuals, where concerns over work-life balance and job stability shape career decisions. Consequently, the hospitality sector struggles to compete with other commercial fields that can offer more

stable working conditions and clearer timelines for career advancement.

Misalignment of Workplace Expectations

There is a significant gap between what new entrants expect and the actual operational environment of a hotel. The demand for irregular working hours, weekend shifts and unpredictable schedules contradict the strong preference of today's candidates for a stable work-life balance. Additionally, employees increasingly aim for rapid career progression, often anticipating promotions within their first year of employment. If these operational realities and career timelines are not clearly explained during the interview stage, new hires often experience frustration and leave the organisation shortly after joining.

Shortage of Candidates for Frontline Roles

Recruitment for positions that interact directly with guests has become increasingly challenging across the industry. Many job seekers explicitly express a preference for back-office roles, such as accounting or administration, to avoid the emotional stress of handling complaints or communicating verbally with the public. There is a growing tendency for candidates to label their own personalities as introverted to justify avoiding duties that involve service delivery in person. This

widespread reluctance to engage in direct communication creates a severe bottleneck in filling essential customer service positions at the front desk and in food and beverage outlets.

Changes in Recruitment Assessment Methods

The widespread use of mobile devices and AI is changing how candidates are evaluated during the recruitment process. Traditional written tests are becoming less effective, as digital tools allow applicants to access or generate standard answers easily. To better understand the true capabilities of a candidate, employers are proactively shifting their evaluation methods. Employers are shifting towards practical interview formats that assess candidates' ability to communicate, respond to scenarios and demonstrate real-time problem-solving skills.

Limitations of Fragmented Internship Schedules

Internships serve as a key source of new talent, but current scheduling trends may reduce their overall effectiveness. Influenced by flexible working cultures, some trainees attend work for only one or two days a week, creating an interrupted learning experience. These fragmented schedules make it difficult for students to fully understand daily hotel operations, retain knowledge, or build meaningful relationships with colleagues.

Furthermore, managing such sporadic schedules places an additional administrative burden on existing staff, making it harder for trainees to transition smoothly into full-time employment upon graduation.

Recommendations

Government and Relevant Authorities

Collaboration on Industry Transition

As the industry adjusts to changing demand structures, including a stronger reliance on regional markets and shorter booking cycles, continuous collaboration with relevant authorities helps operators maintain service quality. Government initiatives, such as the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry 2.0, provide strategic direction to support long-term tourism growth and strengthen Hong Kong's positioning as a destination. While these initiatives contribute to market recovery, their impact on manpower demand is likely to be gradual. In addition, the continued promotion of large-scale events can generate short-term demand peaks, supporting business activity and helping the industry sustain workforce requirements during periods of adjustment. Closer coordination between event organisers, government authorities and industry stakeholders may further support manpower planning for major events. Improved forecasting of workforce requirements would enable hotels to prepare staffing arrangements, training support and temporary manpower deployment more effectively during peak demand periods.

Strengthening of Industry Service Standards and Professionalism

Maintaining a transparent and consistent regulatory environment is essential to safeguarding the reputation of the hotel sector. Encouraging the adoption of recognised service standards across the industry would support fair competition and reinforce professionalism.

Relevant authorities may consider facilitating initiatives that promote best practices and industry benchmarks, thereby strengthening the credibility of the sector and enhancing confidence for sustained investment in workforce development.

Facilitation of Employment and Training Arrangements

As employment regulations evolve, maintaining a continuous dialogue between relevant authorities and the industry remains highly beneficial. This ongoing exchange of views helps ensure that updates to employment frameworks can be implemented smoothly while accommodating the unique operational nature and seasonal fluctuations of the hospitality sector. To support talent development, streamlining administrative arrangements for extended internship durations would encourage the industry to offer more structured training placements

and strengthen the long-term talent pipeline.

Industry

Evolving Talent Management for Today's Workforce

To improve retention and reduce early attrition, hotels should refine their talent management strategies to better align with the expectations of today's candidates. This includes establishing clearer pathways for career progression and ensuring that expectation management is addressed at the recruitment stage. Clearly explaining job requirements, including shift duties and operational demands, would help align expectations prior to employment. Providing structured support and maintaining open communication channels can help bridge generational differences and contribute to a more stable workforce.

Management of Internal Competition for Manpower

Competition for talent within the local hospitality sector remains intense, with organisations frequently adjusting remuneration packages and fringe benefits to attract staff. This has contributed to increased workforce mobility within industry, creating challenges in maintaining workforce continuity. To address this, organisations should adopt a more sustainable approach to talent management, focusing on long-term engagement rather than short-term

competition. Establishing clear development pathways and maintaining consistent management practices would support stronger workforce commitment and reduce turnover.

Strategic Use of Operational Technology

Organisations should continue to leverage technology to enhance operational efficiency and reduce reliance on manual processes. Establishing clear internal guidelines on the use of AI tools is necessary to ensure appropriate application and data security. This enables employees to focus more on delivering personalised guest experiences, including service innovation and relationship-building, which remain key competitive advantages in the hospitality sector. Customer analytics may also support service optimisation by helping hotels better understand evolving guest preferences. This enables operators to review lower-demand services and facilities, redirect resources towards offerings that create greater guest value, and improve manpower utilisation within a high-cost operating environment.

Support for Service Models Focused on Experiences

As demand shifts towards experience-driven offerings, hotels should develop workforce capability in areas such as guest engagement and service personalisation. Investing in skills required for managing family-oriented programmes and

recreational activities would enhance service delivery. A workforce equipped to support these offerings will be better positioned to meet evolving customer expectations and sustain competitiveness.

Empowerment of Middle Management

Organisations should place stronger emphasis on leadership development for their supervisory staff. Middle managers are increasingly required to lead a more diverse workforce, including a mix of experienced employees, part-time staff and younger entrants with evolving expectations. Equipping these managers with the necessary skills in mentorship, expectation management and team communication will strengthen their ability to manage diverse team dynamics effectively. Enhancing leadership capability at this level would contribute to improved workplace cohesion, stronger staff engagement and more stable workforce retention. Attention may be placed on strengthening communication between managers and employees from different generations, helping to bridge differences in workplace expectations and improve team engagement.

Education and Training Providers

Alignment of Placement Structures

Education and Training Providers should collaborate closely with the industry to

review the format and duration of internship programmes. The industry observes that standard placements lasting only three months are too brief for students to adapt fully to the hotel environment. It is recommended to explore options for continuous blocks of training lasting six to twelve months, providing students with an in-depth understanding of hotel operations. Unlike fragmented schedules, these extended placements allow trainees to acquire practical skills thoroughly, build relationships with colleagues, and improve their readiness for full-time employment. Establishing structured mentorship frameworks during these extended placements will provide the necessary support for younger generations to adapt successfully to the workplace. Industry projects, competitions and workplace-based assignments may also provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their capabilities and gain practical exposure prior to full-time employment.

Cultivation of Adaptability and Risk Management Skills

The current hospitality environment is characterised by high volatility and sudden shifts in business volume. Education and Training Providers must prepare students to handle unexpected disruptions and last-minute adjustments. Incorporating risk management principles and training focused on flexibility into the curriculum will equip graduates to manage fluctuating demands and maintain service standards under intense pressure.

Focus on Practical Communication and Interpersonal Resilience

Curricula should place a heavy emphasis on applied communication to address the reluctance of newer entrants to speak directly with guests. Education and Training Providers need to guide students away from using rigid personality labels as justifications for avoiding duties related to customer service. Incorporating intensive exercises involving role play, simulations for service recovery, and scenarios for resolving conflicts will help students build the necessary confidence to transition from digital communication habits to interacting with the public in person.

Development of Advanced Digital and Analytical Competence

Education and Training Providers must update their technology modules to reflect current practices in the commercial workplace. Beyond teaching students how to operate digital tools fundamentally, training must cover advanced analytical prompting and the generation of complex instructions for AI platforms. Furthermore, students must develop a strong awareness of data security to prevent the exposure of confidential corporate information on public platforms. Cultivating the analytical skills required to verify information ensures that graduates use technology responsibly, rather than relying on automated outputs as quick solutions without validation.

Commercial Context in Sustainability Education

When teaching ESG concepts, Education and Training Providers should always incorporate practical business applications. Academic projects often propose sustainability initiatives without considering the actual financial capabilities of an operation. Educating students on how to properly evaluate the financial implications, operational feasibility, and cost-benefit balance of sustainability projects will ensure they are equipped with a pragmatic approach to environmental initiatives.