

Case study: Building a more inclusive workforce at voco Belfast, part of the INUA Collection



THE CHALLENGE

Hospitality continues to face persistent recruitment and retention issues. For voco Belfast, this has meant navigating a highly competitive labour market, marked by high employment rates and intense competition for skilled employees. At the same time, the hotel has been determined to diversify and strengthen its workforce, building a team that better reflects the communities it serves.

THE INITIATIVE

Flexible and family friendly working

Flexibility has become a cornerstone of voco Belfast's approach to attracting and retaining staff. Key measures include:

- Flexible hours and job-sharing, particularly in management roles.
- Options for casual contracts and hybrid work.
- Enhanced maternity, paternity, and adoption pay aligned with DEI strategies and a new family-friendly strategy.

"There's so many kinds of flexible working practices that we put in place now... it's very rare that we say no."

Community & training partnerships

Strong community links help voco Belfast access underrepresented talent and build meaningful career pathways into hospitality. The hotel collaborates with a range of partners to create opportunities and targeted outreach, including:

- Active engagement with schools and colleges
- The Women Returners Programme and other initiatives supporting people re-entering the workforce
- Disability & neurodivergence support via supported employment organisations including employability actively working towards JAM Accreditation.

- Ambassador partnerships with Springboard & employability programmes
- Careers fairs targeting diverse groups
- Work placement opportunities
- Mentoring young people through the Future Leaders Programme (Co-operation Ireland) & hosting residential and site visits to create meaningful career opportunities.
- Involvement in Linen Quarter bid initiatives from Litter picking, planting to supporting local events such as react festival and Health Week.

Skills development & promotion

Developing talent from within ensures that inclusion translates into progression. voco Belfast invests in training and leadership pathways that allow employees to grow their skills and careers.

- Apprenticeships to boost internal talent
- Investment in trainee management and leadership development programme at hotel and group level.

Inclusive recruitment practices

Recruitment processes have been redesigned to be transparent, consistent, and accessible.

- Structured interviews, diverse panels, and behavioural questions
- Manager training on bias, reasonable adjustments, and inclusive recruitment



Culture & wellbeing

Creating a genuinely inclusive culture is seen as an ongoing process. The INUA Collection has achieved silver accreditation from the Irish Centre for Diversity, with policies and support systems that promote dignity and wellbeing at every level.

- Dignity & Respect & Equal Opportunities policies embedded in onboarding and annual training tailored to team member and leadership levels.
- Health & Wellbeing partnership with NICHs through their work well live well programme with trained health champions in business and monthly themes.
- Menopause policy, management training and team member toolkits to support employee wellbeing
- vocos Voice – employee committee with representatives from each department aiding communication and strengthening employee voice and fairness

THE IMPACT

The outcomes of voco Belfast's inclusive recruitment strategy have been both practical and cultural. By rethinking how people are hired, supported, and developed, the hotel has created measurable business benefits while fostering a stronger, more connected workforce. Key results include:

81% retention rate

at leadership level– reducing turnover and recruitment costs

- Improved engagement and diversity across teams
- Greater confidence in disability inclusion and accessible hiring
- More inclusive leadership pipeline through internal progression



CONCLUSION

Hospitality employers can unlock new talent by rethinking traditional recruitment approaches. For voco Belfast inclusive recruitment has led to lower turnover, higher engagement, and stronger progression pathways all while supporting broader business resilience. Key takeaways from this approach include:

- Prioritise retention – it's your best recruitment strategy
- Embrace flexible working – it attracts and retains diverse talent
- Partner with organisations that support underrepresented groups
- Train hiring managers and embed inclusion across the employee journey
- Challenge outdated perceptions of hospitality careers

“When inclusion is authentic and aligned with business goals, it delivers real value.”