



IoH Broadsheet

The Institute of Hospitality Broadsheet is a thought-leadership article written by a Member or Fellow of the Institute. Celebrating the wealth of professionalism, knowledge and expertise within our diverse, worldwide hospitality family, the IoH Broadsheet is published exclusively for members.

Reframing the Narrative Around Hospitality'

In this month's IoH Broadsheet, IoH CEO **Robert Richardson FIH** and **Sacha Lord FIH**, Chair of The Night Time Industries Association, Founder of Parklife and The Warehouse Project, co-author: **'Reframing the Narrative Around Hospitality.'**

Having worked all their lives in hospitality, at varying ends of the spectrum, these two notable industry leaders jointly reflect on the ongoing media negativity surrounding the industry and its workforce. Examining how, by 'reframing the narrative', the industry can not only retain its current workforce but also inspire the next generation to choose hospitality as a profession of choice, not chance.



Introduction

Hospitality, as a profession, remains one of the world's great equalisers, a place where anyone, from any background, can learn, progress and succeed within a profession (not industry), that employs 320 million people globally, 3.5 million of which are in the UK.

Whether it's a small independent operator or a global hotel group listed on the FTSE 100, our core business principles are universal: service, people, experience, and community.

However, in 2026, hospitality firms across the world continue to struggle to recruit and retain talent. Enthusiastic teams remain the foundation of our success, yet increasingly, hospitality is presented as a profession under strain, operating at the upper threshold of taxation, wage obligations and regulatory burden.

Here, the logic aligns closely with the principles of the Laffer Curve, in that beyond a certain point, increasing costs and reduced income no longer generate proportional economic return.

Instead, those pressures risk reducing output, investment, innovation and critically for hospitality the incentive to work, grow or even continue trading. When the fiscal burden grows heavier than the reward, participation and productivity naturally fall, shrinking the very revenue base governments and societies depend on.

It is no surprise that against this context future talent may look at our profession unfavourably, or at the least consider it a profession that has ever decreasing potential for career advancement.

Whilst none of the external financial challenges we face globally can be resolved within one article, we will address the need to reframe the narrative surrounding hospitality, looking at why we are a profession with limitless potential, and how by doing this we not only retain our current workforce but inspire the next generation to see hospitality as a profession of choice, not chance.

However, our work has been made much harder post UK-Budget. With wide media coverage of the current plight of hospitality businesses, it is down to us to change the narrative and show how positive our sector, the UK's fifth largest sector, can be.

The impact of a balanced narrative, and why it matters

The hospitality profession has long been celebrated for its role in community, employment and global mobility. Yet recently, the narrative has skewed and there is a fine line between positive and negative.

This is surprising. Hospitality is a significant global industry with the worldwide hospitality market valued at around US \$4.39 trillion. In the UK alone hospitality contributes some £93 billion to the economy annually and supports around 3.5 million jobs, something of value – real, tangible value, whether you understand our profession or otherwise.

When the focus rests solely on costs and uncertainty, the narrative, while valid and necessary, becomes unbalanced. In doing so, we risk diminishing the perception of hospitality as a profession of opportunity, growth, and long-term career value. A conversation centred only on the challenges overlooks the creativity, mobility, and upward progression that define us at our best.

How our profession is portrayed in the media influences the perception of our professional identity. An unbalanced and negative narrative, whilst partially accurate, is an unbalanced portrayal harmful to recruitment, morale and our professions identity- for this generation. A profession that in the UK has more than 110,000 vacancies, and a need to recruit.

Case study: Hospitality as a pathway to opportunity

During 2025, Richardson encountered a young chef whose career in hospitality began following a period of homelessness. Through an entry-level talent scheme operated by a hotel group, she discovered not merely employment, but a profession, one that offered structured training, development, and a genuine pathway to progress. She quickly excelled, standing out across multiple hotels in the UK and Ireland.

Beyond her role in the kitchen, she continues to give back to her community. Still in her chef whites, she regularly cooks for a local homeless shelter, supported by her employer and motivated by a desire to help those facing the challenges she once experienced.

These are the tangible, human stories that demonstrate hospitality's role as a force for social good, stories that risk being lost when the narrative focuses solely on pressure, cost, and constraint. While debate will always exist about where emphasis should lie, a more balanced narrative is not only fairer but essential if hospitality is to inspire future talent and be recognised for what it truly is: a profession of opportunity, purpose, and impact.



Strategic communication is key

Sacha Lord was, up until recently, both a Labour Party member and donor. He didn't renew his membership as he felt they had let Hospitality down but still holds Labour values. Lord has also recently met with Daisy Cooper, Deputy of the Liberal Democrats and spoke on a panel at the Conservative party conference.

Lord explains: "Far too many people and Trade Bodies are too tribal when it comes to politics and it's the wrong approach. We should be having open conversations with all parties and all MPs. Most share the love of Hospitality and cross-party support can become very powerful."

Policy engagement

There has been some powerful work regarding policy engagement, especially both during and coming out of Covid. During that period, the Government felt, possibly for the first time, how important hospitality was, not just for our High Streets, but also for the wellbeing of the public. A pub is much more than a pint; it's a part of our social fabric.

This was the start of real engagement from the likes of the Institute of Hospitality and the NTIA, where our voices, opinions and advice were heard. The most recent example of engagement was when the UK Government misunderstood the damage the change in business rates would do to the sector. They listened and had to U Turn.

Balance matters

- **Narrative is important.** What we call our profession — a "sector in crisis" vs. a "global profession", a "job" vs. a "career", an "industry" vs. a "profession" shape how people engage with it.
- **Data supports the positive story.** The £93 billion UK contribution and global growth underline that hospitality is far from marginal.
- **People are our greatest asset.** In times of financial pressure, the temptation is to focus only on cost-control; we argue for investing in culture, progression and values-led workplaces.
- **Identity and professional status matter.** Referring to hospitality as a profession (rather than a casual industry) builds internal pride and external respect.
- **Strategic communication is key.** Leaders must tell a balanced story, acknowledge pressures honestly, but also project opportunity, innovation, purpose and talent.



"As the CEO of the Institute of Hospitality, and a former hotel general manager, I understand operational pressures, both within the balance sheet and operationally. Equally across the past four years it has been a pleasure to welcome, since 2022, more than 2,500 students to our annual Passion4Hospitality: The Future Leaders Conference. Numbers that have confidently increased every year."

Robert Richardson FIH

Current research, best practices and theoretical models

One pattern that has emerged over the years, is employees are now choosing to work with the right company, a company that reflects their values and will appreciate them, and that possibly comes before salary. Examples include not over working the hours, care for employees' well-being, and even free gym memberships!

From a theoretical standpoint, narrative-framing theory suggests that how we describe our profession influences behaviour, engagement and identity.

Conclusion

Hospitality as a profession faces real pressures - cost inflation, persistent staffing shortages, and tightening margins that create increasing challenges to convert to profit.

But in order to future proof our profession our narrative must evolve, because we are not a vulnerable "sector" or "industry", but a global, dynamic profession, employing millions of people, creating communities, creating career paths and creating economic growth globally.

By reframing our narrative, ensuring the positive is not overwhelmed by the negative, and shifting from survival-mode to opportunity-mode, we ensure we have a business, a profession, that remains attractive to our current and future generations, ensuring long-term success.

As we know, Hospitality can be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable sectors to work in.



ARE YOU READY FOR TOMORROW?

"I'm an example of what can be achieved in this sector. Having left school with no A-Levels, I went on to create the world's biggest nightclub and the UK's biggest metropolitan festival, both which I sold in March 2024. I became the first Night Time Economy Adviser for Greater Manchester and now sit as the Chair of the Night Time Industries Association. I am of course, also a proud Fellow of the Institute of Hospitality."

Sacha Lord FIH

About the authors

Robert Richardson FIH MI is Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Hospitality (IoH), the world's largest professional body for hospitality professionals. His career spans hotel floor roles through to General Manager positions with global brands including Hilton Worldwide, IHG, and Ramada Jarvis, before moving into leadership roles within luxury independent properties in England.

A committed advocate for inclusivity and professional development, Robert led the IoH to win the Chartered Governance Institute UK and Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Strategy of the Year award in 2021. Internationally recognised, he has been named among Europe's 100 Most Powerful Hospitality Figures and one of the 50 Most Inspirational People in Global Hospitality.

In 2022, he was appointed an Honorary Master Innholder, underscoring his leadership in shaping global hospitality standards.



Robert is a frequent speaker on the international stage and serves as a trustee for Room to Reward, a charity celebrating volunteer contributions.



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Sacha Lord FIH co-founded The Warehouse Project and Parklife - the UK's largest metropolitan festival, who have hosted some of the biggest names in music, including Snoop Dogg, Liam Gallagher and Skepta.

In 2018 he was appointed as Greater Manchester's first-ever Night Time Economy Adviser, working with Mayor Andy Burnham and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, consulting on all issues relating to the Night Time Economy and provided a voice for workers, operators and the industry at large.

He is currently Chair of the Night Time Industries Association, Chair of Wythenshawe F.C and founder of the Sacha Lord Foundation. A charity which supports young people from Greater Manchester to carve out a career in the events and hospitality sector.



CONNECT WITH
SACHA LORD FIH



Further resources, guidance and advice

- Institute of Hospitality Market Intelligence
- "Addressing labour shortages in the hospitality sector". Moore Kingston Smith
- Government policy on hospitality contributions: UK Government "Britain's hospitality sector to save £3 million under new scheme". GOV.UK

References

- "Addressing labour shortages in the hospitality sector 2024". Moore Kingston Smith
- "Economic contribution of the hospitality industry." Ignite Economics/Committee Letter. UK Parliament Committees+1
- Global market data showing - US \$4.39 trillion (2022) global hospitality market value. bsmedia.business-standard.com+1