

Erasmus+ project

Keen & New in Tourism

WP2 Intermediary report - Survey results
October 2025



Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Erasmus+ project

Keen & New in Tourism

WP2 Intermediary report - Survey results

October 2025

Developed by Luigi D'Ambrosio and Anna Hammershøy, UCN (Denmark)

Sofie Norrlund, ÅYG (Åland, Finland)

Lene Sørbråten, NG VGS (Norway)



Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction and Method.....4
- 2. Survey in North Jutland, Denmark5
- 3. Survey in Gudbrandsdal, Norway19
- 4. Survey in Åland, Finland.....32
- 5. Comparison and Discussion of Findings.....45
- 6. Conclusion53
- 7. References.....55

1. Introduction and method

The second phase of data collection in the KNiT24 project consists of a quantitative survey, distributed to hospitality and tourism businesses in the three participating regions: North Jutland in Denmark, the district of Gudbrandsdalen Innlandet in Norway, and the autonomous region of Åland in Finland.

The questionnaire was developed through collaboration by the KNiT24 project team in Microsoft Forms and is based on reviewed academic literature and the results of the focus group interviews (Phase one of the WP2 of this project). The original English questionnaire version was translated into Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. To increase the reach and minimize the bias we sent out the questionnaires through different channels, such as our respective professional networks, local Destination Management Organisations, LinkedIn networks etc. We also included the tourism companies and organisations earlier recruited to participate in two KNiT24 workshops in Gudbrandsdalen and Åland. We are aware that the fact that our professional networks were involved may create a slight bias (positive interest for the KNiT2024 project).

We have received 78 responses from North Jutland (63 usable), 40 (33 usable) from Gudbrandsdalen Innlandet and 30 (29 usable) from Åland, making 125 usable responses in total.

While the first phase of data collection, focus group interviews, provided in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of learners, this subsequent survey targets industry representatives directly involved in recruitment and retention of staff. By including the perspective of employers, the objective of the survey is to capture region-specific challenges, strategies, and future competence needs within the sector.

Although the number of responses is too low to make statistically significant comparisons, the quantitative approach allows for the collection of comparable data across the three regions and provides an indication of patterns and tendencies. We must also note that the populations of Gudbrandsdalen and Åland, as well as the number of tourism and hospitality companies, are in fact small.

The survey responses complement the findings from phase one and contribute to a more comprehensive situation analysis (WP2 of the KNiT24 project). Together, the qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) data provide a foundation for the further development of WP3 (Co-creation for co-operation) ensuring that both the voices of learners and the perspectives of industry are represented in the project's roadmap.

2. Survey in North Jutland, Denmark

In North Jutland, the survey was conducted in Danish and answered by 78 respondents. 63 respondents were directly involved in staff recruitment and retention (Figure 2.1).

1. Jeg er direkte eller indirekte involveret i rekruttering og/eller fastholdelse af medarbejdere i min virksomhed.



Figure 2.1: Respondents in North Jutland

2.1 Respondents and company description

Most respondents work in the accommodation and Food & Beverage (F&B) sectors represented by 34 and 22 respondents respectively, followed by tourist attractions, tourism companies and event companies (Figure 2.2).

- 43% of respondents come from companies with 11 to 50 employees,
- 33% from companies with over 50 employees,
- 24% from smaller companies with 1 to 10 employees (Figure 2.3).

The Danish respondents are represented by managers (25), followed by owners (22) and supervisors (14) (Figure 2.4).

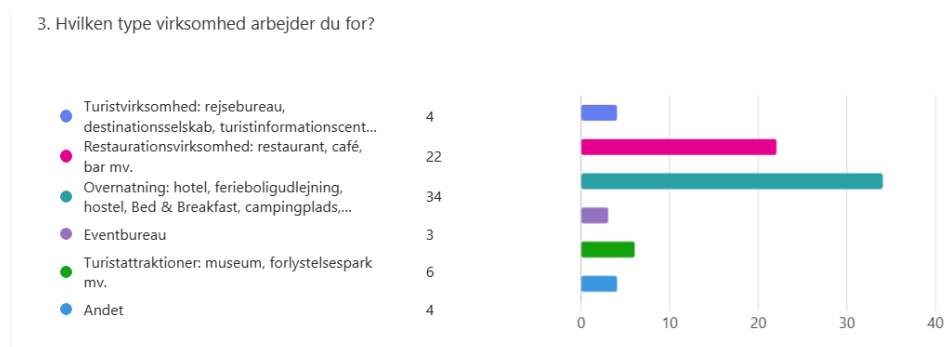


Figure 2.2: North Jutland respondents by company type.

4. Hvor mange medarbejdere arbejder i din virksomhed?



Figure 2.3: Company size, North Jutland.

5. Hvad er din funktion i virksomheden? Du kan vælge op til to muligheder.



Figure 2 4: Respondents' professional role within the company.

2.2 Staff recruitment

One section of the questionnaire focused on challenges connected to staff recruitment. Respondents were asked whether they had faced difficulties in hiring the right workforce during the past 18 months, and if so, in which areas or positions these challenges occurred (Figure 2.5). 42 Danish respondents had either experienced or partly experienced challenges in recruiting the right workforce during the past 18 months, mainly in the kitchen (27), customer service (19), and front office (12).



7. Hvis JA eller DELVIS, inden for hvilke områder/stillinger? Du kan vælge op til 5 muligheder

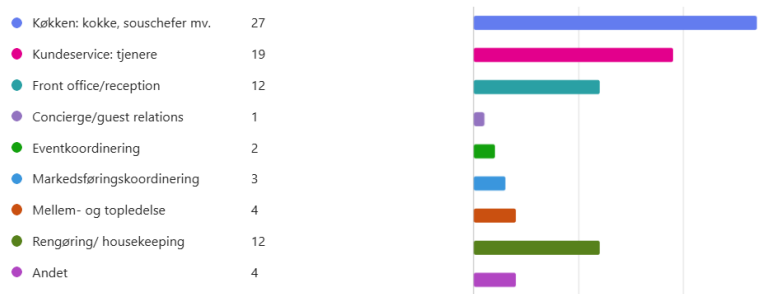


Figure 2.5: Challenges in staff recruitment.

2.3 Channels used for staff recruitment

The survey responses from Danish hospitality and tourism businesses show a strong reliance on social and digital platforms as recruitment channels (Figure 2.6). The most frequently used are:

- social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram (45 responses),
- followed closely by job portals (44),

- personal or professional networks through word-of-mouth (42).
- Company websites also play a notable role (37).

In contrast, LinkedIn (27) is less used, while collaboration with vocational or professional schools (11), recruitment agencies or head-hunters (5), and other unspecified channels (1) are only marginally represented.

9. Hvilke kanaler bruger din virksomhed til at rekruttere nye medarbejdere? Du kan vælge op til 3 muligheder.

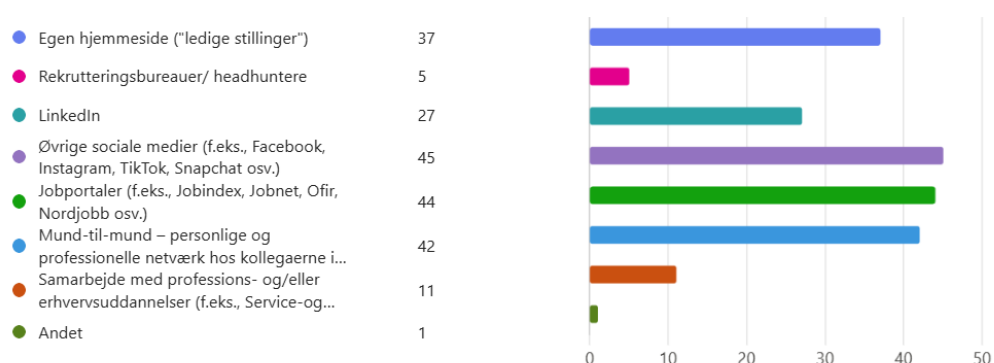


Figure 2.6: Channels used for staff recruitment.

2.4 Challenges in staff retention

The Danish survey responses indicate that retention challenges are not perceived as a significant challenge. Most respondents (42) report that they have not experienced difficulties in retaining staff over the past 18 months, while 13 indicate partial challenges and only 8 confirm clear retention problems. These results suggest that retention issues, though present, are less prominent than recruitment challenges (Figure 2.7).

Among those reporting challenges, the primary explanations reflect these factors:

- Seasonal fluctuations are the most frequently cited reason (16 responses), dissatisfaction with salary levels (7),
- dissatisfaction with workplace relationships (6),
- stress and burnout (4),

- dissatisfaction with the work environment (3),
- limited opportunities for development (2).

An important finding is that most responses fall under categories “do not know” (27) or “other” (unfortunately, in this survey unspecified) reasons (19), which means that we still have a high uncertainty about this question. Do companies attempt to investigate the true causes of employee premature exits? Or could it be a sensitive subject, e.g. a reflection on poor leadership or unsatisfactory company culture?



11. Hvis JA eller DELVIS, hvad var de primære årsager til, at de forlod virksomheden? Du kan vælge op til 3 muligheder.

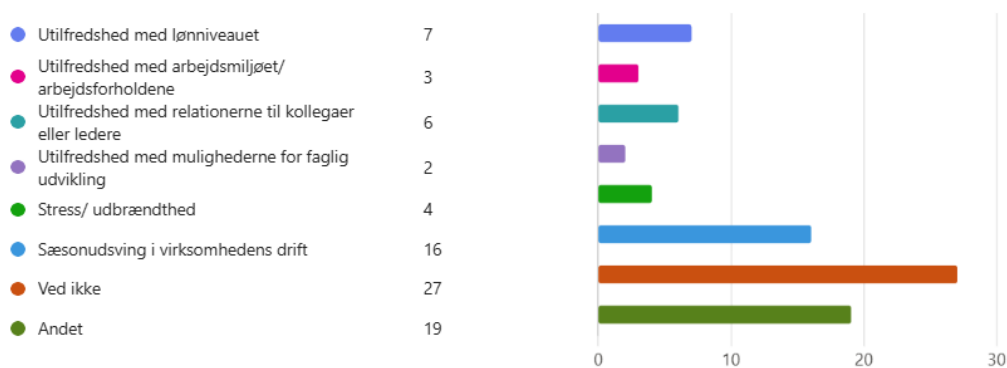


Figure 2.7: Challenges in staff retainment

2.5 Initiatives for staff retainment

As shown in Figure 2.8, our Danish respondents employ a variety of initiatives to retain staff. The most frequently reported measures are:

- employee benefits, such as bonuses and discounts (46 responses),
- social activities and teambuilding (40)
- flexible working hours (39)
- training opportunities, both internal and external (34),
- introduction programmes for new employees (34).

In contrast, career development opportunities (13), business trips (1), and “other” initiatives (5) are reported far less often.

12. Hvad gør din virksomhed for at fastholde medarbejdere. Du kan vælge op til 5 muligheder.

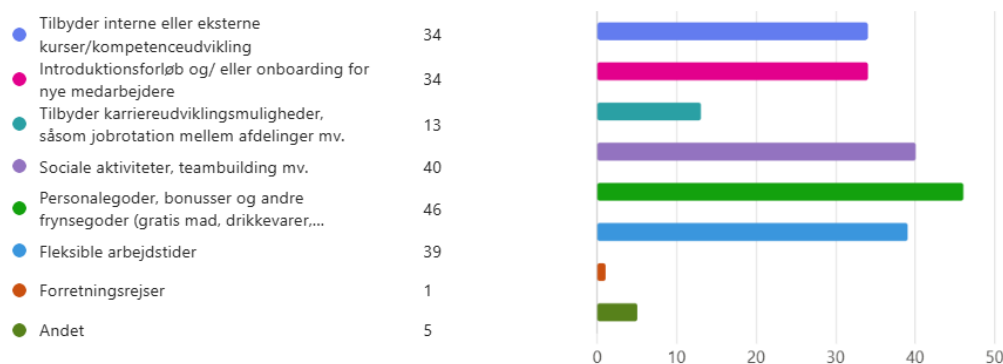


Figure 2.7: Initiatives for staff retainment

2.6 Awareness of workplace challenges

Figure 2.9 presents the responses from Danish participants regarding their perceived organizational awareness of three key challenges commonly faced in the hospitality and tourism industry: irregular working hours, emotional labour, and lack of work-life balance.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "In my company, we are aware of the following issues." The response options ranged from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree.

The data show a varied level of perceived awareness across the three issues. While a notable proportion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their company is aware of emotional labour and irregular working hours, the issue of work-life balance appears to receive slightly less recognition.

13. Forskning fra forskellige europæiske lande viser, at medarbejdere i hospitality- og turistbranchen kan opleve stress og udbændthed på grund af skæve arbejdstider, følelsesmæssige krav ("emotional labour") og mangel på balance mellem arbejde og fritid.

Er du enig eller uenig i følgende udsagn? "I min virksomhed er vi opmærksomme på de følgende problemstillinger."

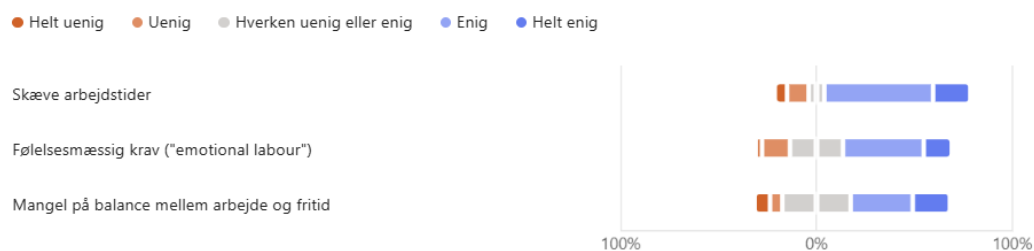


Figure 2.8: Awareness of workplace challenges

2.7 Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges

Figure 2.10 illustrates the responses from Danish participants regarding whether their company actively works to reduce the potential negative effects of three common workplace stressors: irregular working hours, emotional labour, and lack of work-life balance.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their company takes action to mitigate these issues (Yes/ No).

The results show that most respondents affirm that their company addresses the challenges of lack of work-life balance and emotional labour. However, fewer respondents report that their company is actively working to reduce the negative

effect of irregular working hours, suggesting that this area may be underprioritized in current organisational strategies or more difficult to address.

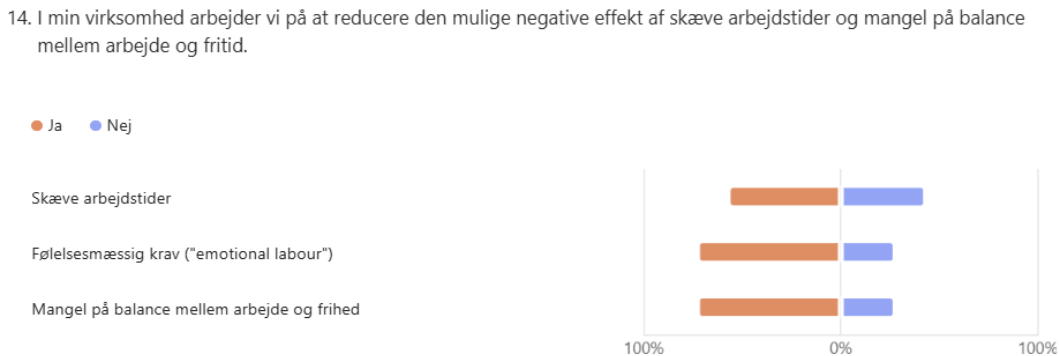


Figure 2.9: Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges.

The respondents were also asked to share their positive experiences on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance. We received 34 open responses to the question, which we analysed by identifying common patterns. These are presented in Table 2.1 below:

Theme	Description	Mentions	Quotes (AI-generated translation from the original)
Planning and Structured Scheduling	Emphasis on advance planning, structured shift allocation, adjusting after events, and designing schedules that reduce strain (e.g., fewer consecutive shifts, longer days/fewer shifts).	11	“A structured approach to shift planning, considering number of employees vs. workload, and avoiding too many consecutive shifts.” (#8) “After major events, we work on reducing hours and not pressuring everyone to participate in everything.” (#29)
Flexibility and Employee Autonomy	Allowing staff to swap shifts, request preferred times, self-schedule, or receive flexible accommodations (e.g., working from home, extra days off).	10	“There is great freedom among employees to swap shifts, so it fits their private lives.” (#6) “Flexibility plays a big role with irregular hours – it creates better work–life balance, with possibilities for self-scheduling.” (#10)

Nature of the Industry	Recognition that irregular hours are inevitable in tourism/hospitality and must be accepted as part of the job.	6	“Since peak times are at irregular hours, it is not possible to balance so staff are off then – it is part of the job.” (#21) “It can be difficult in hotels and restaurants – we need staff when guests are there, which is at irregular times.” (#26)
Work–Life Balance & Well-Being	Practices to support employees’ private lives and health: well-being meetings, gratitude, assigning “good” shifts, minimum weekends off.	7	“Try to create a shift plan that considers private life as much as possible – and show gratitude when it’s not possible.” (#16) “Employees affected by irregular hours are given the ‘good’ shifts.” (#30)
Culture & Communication	Building positive workplace culture with social interaction, shared meals, leisure activities, team spirit, and open communication.	6	“We take breaks together, eat staff meals together, maintain a good atmosphere.” (#22) “Strive to create a community with leisure activities.” (#23)
Staffing Strategies (Students, Substitutes, Matching Profiles)	Hiring students, substitutes, or specific profiles to cover irregular shifts, reduce pressure on permanent staff, and match employees to hours.	7	“We have many substitutes and students employed who take many of the irregular shifts.” (#3) “We emphasize matching profiles with specific working hours, hiring different ‘types.’” (#32)
Collective Agreements & Formal Structures	Reliance on collective agreements, committees, or leadership responsibility to ensure fair conditions and avoid overtime.	4	“We work with formal committees between employees and employers, have a collective agreement, and a culture where overtime is avoided.” (#11) “For us, it’s about leadership and proper working conditions – that’s where we focus.” (#31)
Positive Framing of Irregular Hours	Employees enjoy irregular hours, see them as a benefit, or are informed during recruitment to avoid negative perceptions.	3	“My employees work exclusively at irregular hours and love it here.” (#12) “Some fortunately see irregular hours as an advantage – in a 24/7 business it cannot be changed.” (#25)
Event-Specific Adaptation	Larger/multi-day events require additional staffing and	2	“For large events and multi-day events, we try to have more people attached to the event.” (#1)

	afterward hours are reduced to relieve pressure.		
--	--	--	--

Table 2.1 Companies' initiatives on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance (respondents from North Jutland).

2.8 Employees' key competencies

Figure 2.11 presents the responses from Danish participants regarding which competencies they consider most important for their employees, to ensure sustainable operation of their businesses. Respondents were allowed to select up to five competencies from a predefined list.

The most frequently selected competencies were:

- Customer service and interaction (including guest understanding) (52), highlighting the centrality of interpersonal skills in hospitality work,
- Communication skills (39),
- Management of daily operations (34),
- Cooking, preparation, and recipe development (33),

The responses indicate a strong emphasis on both soft skills and core operational capabilities.

Other competencies such as:

- Cultural understanding (26),
- IT and digital skills (16),
- Sustainability competencies (including food waste reduction) (15),
- Strategic leadership (10),
- Critical thinking (9)

were selected less frequently, suggesting that while these areas are acknowledged, they may not yet be prioritized to the same extent.

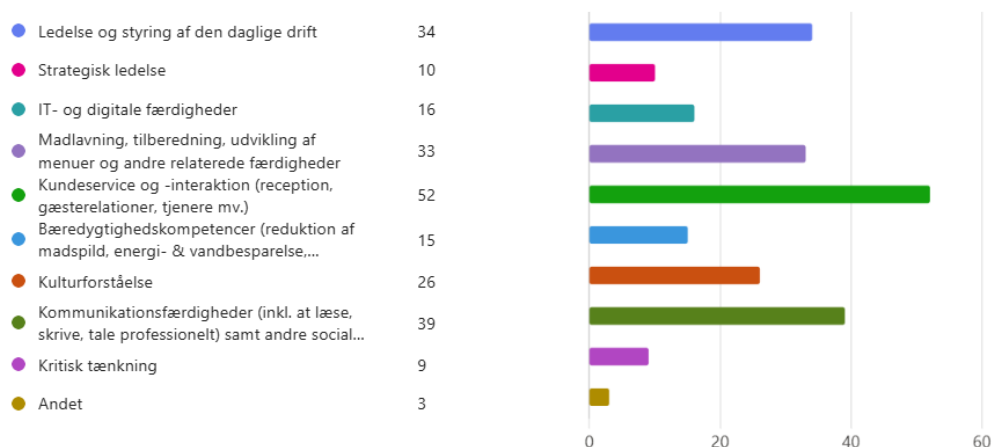


Figure 2.10: Employees' key competencies

2.9 Perceived importance of formal education among employees

Figure 2.12 illustrates how Danish respondents assess the value of formal vocational and/or professional education for their employees. Qualifications referenced include trained chefs, waiters, receptionists, academic professional degree in service ("Serviceøkonom" in Danish) and bachelor's degrees in hospitality or event management.

Most respondents agreed, or partially agreed, that such qualifications are valuable for their company, indicating a general recognition of the importance of formal education in supporting business success. Only a small proportion disagreed, whereas some of the respondents were uncertain, suggesting that while formal training is widely appreciated, there may still be variation in how it is prioritised across different types of hospitality and tourism companies.

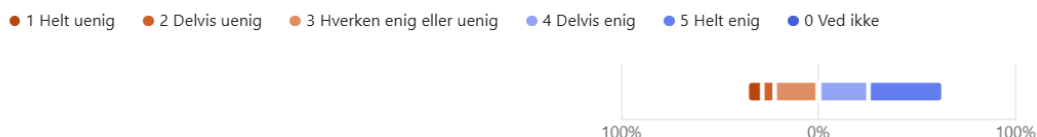


Figure 2.11: Perceived importance of formal education among employees

2.10 Wage differentiation based on formal education

Figure 2.13 presents responses on whether employees with formal vocational education, such as trained chefs, waiters, receptionists, event managers etc., receive higher wages than those without formal qualifications. As the pie chart shows, most responded yes (47) as opposed to 16 negative responses.

18. I min virksomhed får medarbejdere med formel erhvervsuddannelse (fx uddannede kokke, tjenere, receptionister, eventansvarlige mv.) højere løn end medarbejdere uden formelle kvalifikationer.



Figure 2.12: Wage differentiation based on formal education.

2.11 Collaboration with local educational institutions

Figure 2.14 illustrates the extent to which our respondents in North Jutland collaborate with local vocational and professional education institutions, such as Tech College Aalborg and University College of Northern Denmark (UCN).

Most participants (45) indicated that their company engages in such collaborations, with 18 negative responses. This suggests that partnerships between industry and education institutions are common. However, as many of our North Jutland respondents were recruited through our professional network, there may be some bias here.



Figure 2.13: Collaboration with local educational institutions

2.12 Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions

Building on the findings from Figure 2.14, which showed that most Danish hospitality and tourism companies collaborate with local vocational and professional education institutions, Figure 2.15 provides insight into the specific forms that this collaboration takes.

Respondents who indicated that their company engages in such partnerships were asked to select up to three types of collaboration. The most frequently reported form was ongoing collaboration related to

- internships and placements (42),
- guest lectures and company visits (23),
- participation in educational fairs and events (18).

Other forms for collaboration included:

- joint development projects (7),
- other types of collaboration (6),
- ongoing collaboration related to curriculum development (2).

20. Hvis ja, hvordan samarbejder I? (du kan vælge op til tre muligheder):

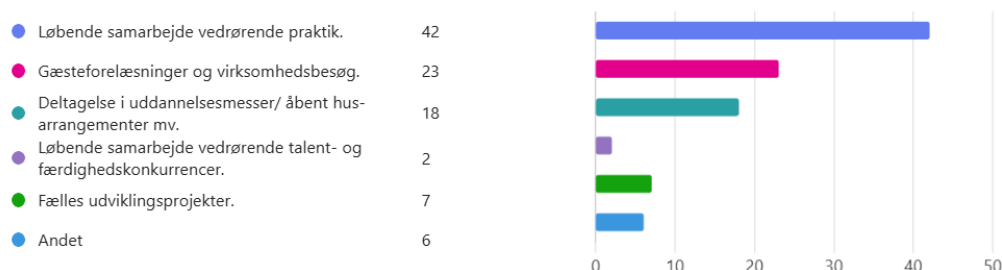


Figure 2.14: Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions

2.13 Interest in collaboration with educational institutions

Figure 2.16 builds on the findings from Figures 2.14 and 2.15 (collaboration with local vocational and professional education institutions), primarily through internships, guest lectures, and participation in educational events.

However, the data in Figure 2.16 reveal a notable divide in future interest: while 35 respondents expressed a willingness to engage in such collaborations, 25 indicated no interest. This lack of interest among over 40% of respondents may be a cause for concern, particularly in the context of ongoing efforts to strengthen ties between education and industry.

The findings suggest that although collaboration is already established in many companies, there remains a significant portion of the sector that is either disengaged or unconvinced of the value of such partnerships.

21. Jeg er interesseret i at samarbejde med en eller flere lokale erhvervs- og/ eller professionshøjskoler (f.eks., Professionshøjskolen UCN, Tech College)



Figure 2.15: Interest in future collaboration with educational institutions

3. Survey in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway

In the Gudbrandsdalen Innlandet administrative region in Norway, the survey was answered by 40 respondents, of which 33 were directly involved in staff recruitment and retention and therefore deemed reliable (Figure 3.1).

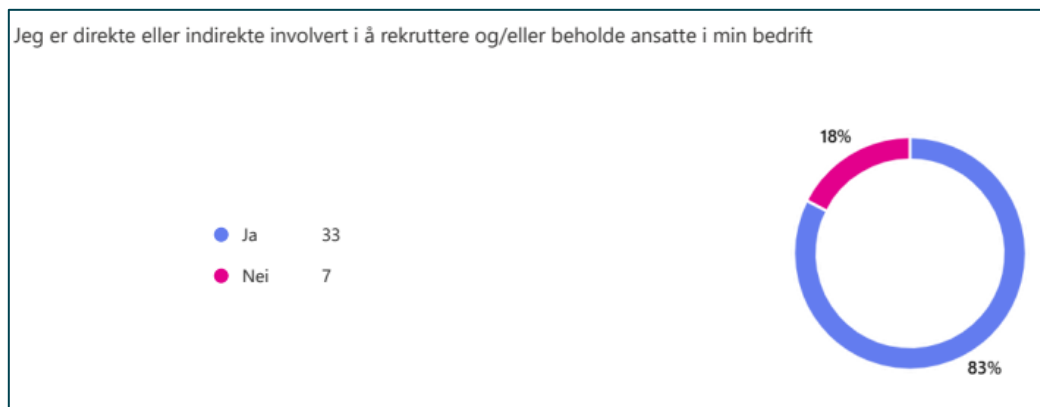


Figure 3.1: Respondents in Gudbrandsdalen

3.1 Respondents and company description

The most represented sectors were accommodation (23 responses) and Food & Beverage (13). Other responses came from tourism and event companies (Figure 3.2). In terms of company size,

48% represent small companies (1-10 employees),

- 45% companies with 11 to 50 employees, and
- 6% represent larger companies with over 50 employees (Figure 3.3).

Our Norwegian respondents were mostly managers (25) and owners (10) (Figure 3.4).

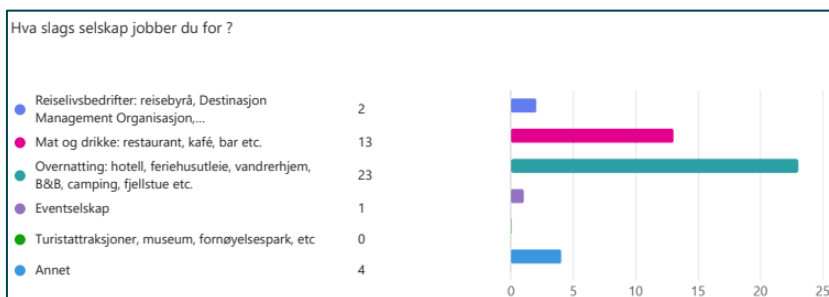


Figure 3.2: Gudbrandsdalen respondents by professional sector



Figure 3.3: Company size, Gudbrandsdalen

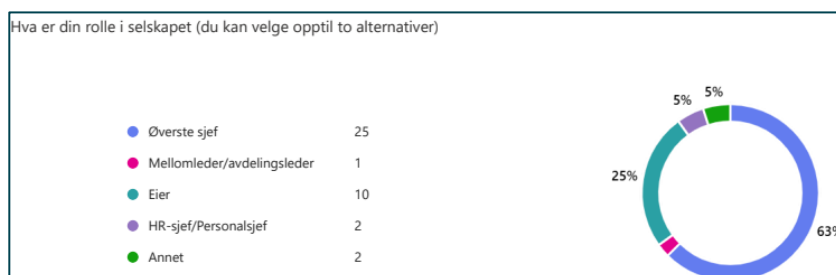


Figure 3.4: Respondents' professional role within the company Gudbrandsdalen

3.2 Staff recruitment

A section of the questionnaire dealt with questions about challenges relating to staff recruitment. Questions were asked about whether our respondents had experienced challenges in recruiting the right staff within the last 18 months, and if so, in which area or position (Figure 3.5). 58% of our Norwegian respondents had experienced challenges in recruiting the right workforce within the last 18 months, with the top three areas being kitchen staff, housekeeping, and customer service (Figure 3.5).

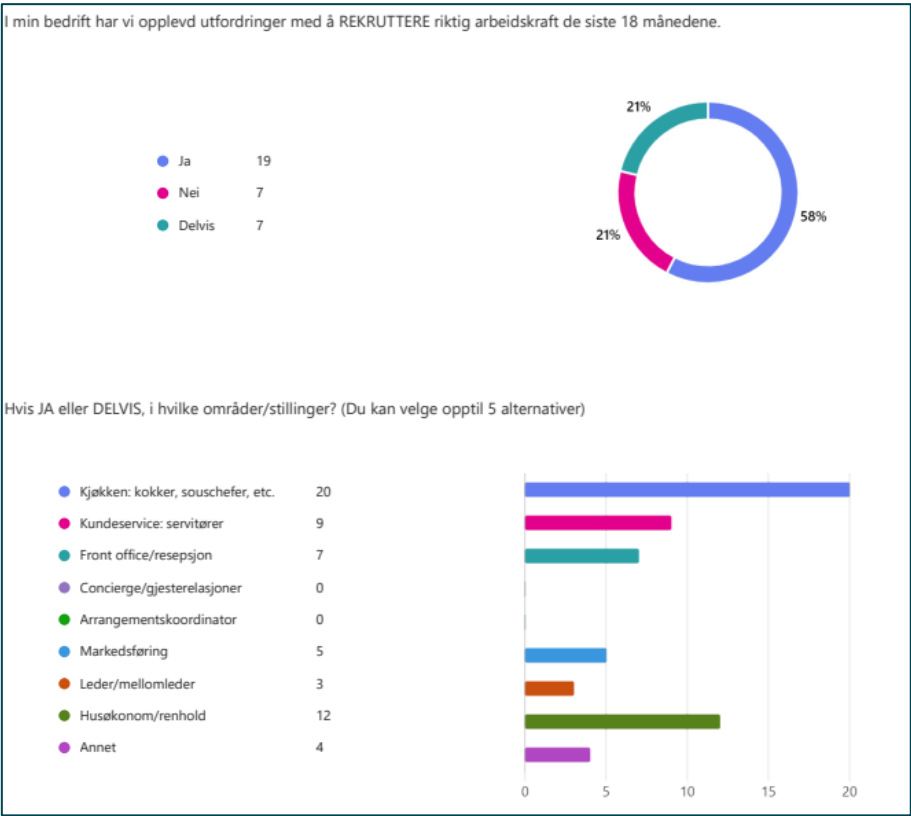


Figure 3.5: Challenges in staff recruitment Gudbrandsdalen

3.3 Channels used for staff recruitment

Figure 3.6 presents data from Norwegian respondents regarding the recruitment channels their companies use to attract new employees or colleagues. Participants could select up to five options from a predefined list.

The most frequently used channels were:

- social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (23),
- word of mouth, including personal and professional networks within the industry (20),
- company's own website (18)
- job search and recruitment platforms such as NAV, Nordjobb, and job fairs (17).

Less frequently selected channels included collaboration with training offices or schools (9), LinkedIn (6), recruiters/head-hunters (4), and other (3).

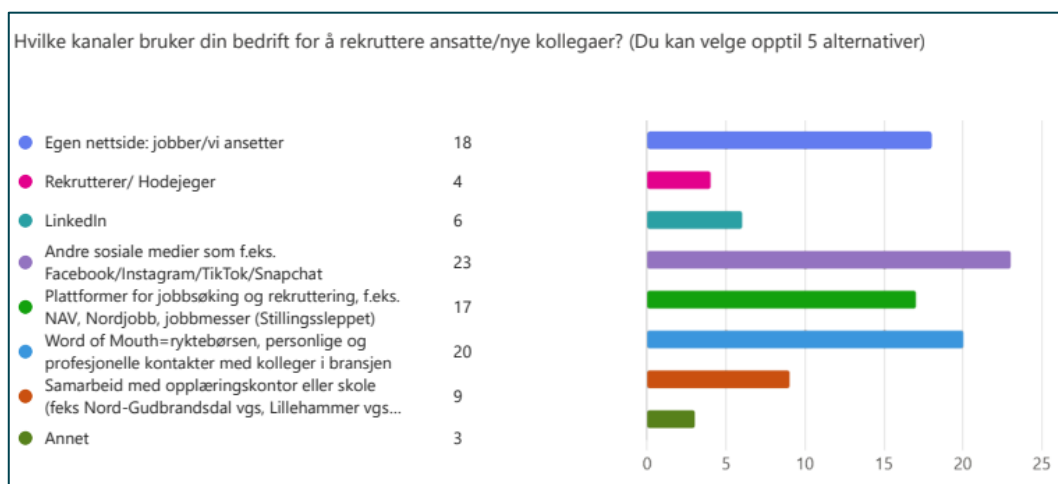


Figure 3.6: Channels used for staff recruitment Gudbrandsdalen.

3.4 Challenges in staff retainment

Retention of employees appears a stable aspect for most Norwegian hospitality enterprises, yet the data reveals important nuances. As shown in Figure 3.7, fewer respondents reported challenges in retaining staff over the past 18 months, with 5 answering Yes and 9 Partially. However, among those who did experience turnover, the most frequently cited reason was seasonal variation in business operations (13), underscoring the structural nature of employment cycles in the sector.

Other reasons were less frequent:

- dissatisfaction with salary levels (5),
- stress or burnout (1),
- limited opportunities for professional development (1).

Again, as with the Danish respondents (2.7, p.8), 24 respondents selected options “do not know” and “other”, suggesting that a high uncertainty about this question or perhaps a sensitive topic for the respondents.

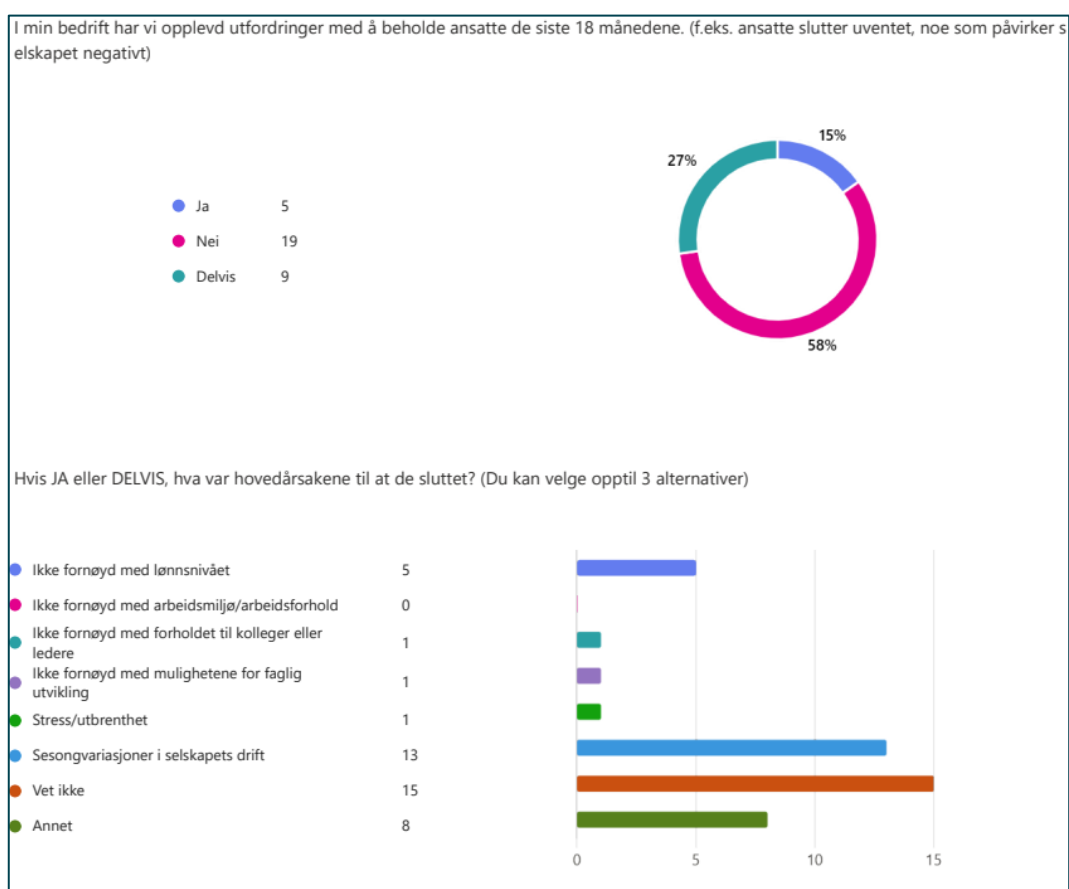


Figure 3.7: Challenges in staff retainment Gudbrandsdalen

3.5 Initiatives for staff retainment

To better understand how Norwegian respondents handle employee retention, the data presented in Figure 3.8 offers insight into the specific strategies companies use to retain staff. This figure complements the findings from Figure 3.7, which

highlighted that seasonality and salary dissatisfaction to play a role in unwanted staff turnover.

The most popular retention strategies are:

- flexible working hours and shift planning (23)
- social activities and team-building initiatives (21) suggesting that companies prioritise work-life balance and workplace culture,
- bonuses and benefits such as free meals or discounts (13), training and development opportunities (12), investment in employee growth.

Less commonly reported strategies include:

- onboarding programmes for new staff (6),
- career development through departmental rotation (5), and
- opportunities for work-related travel (4).

Further four respondents selected other unspecified approaches.

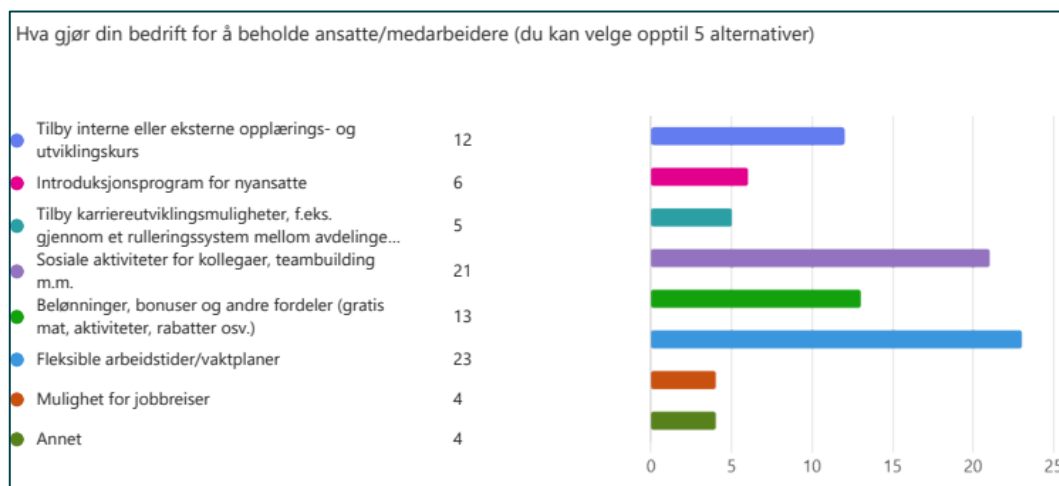


Figure 3.8: Initiatives for staff retainment Gudbrandsdalen

3.6 Awareness of workplace challenges

The responses from Norwegian hospitality and tourism professionals reveal varying levels of organisational awareness regarding key psychosocial challenges in the industry. As illustrated in Figure 3.9, the respondents were asked to indicate

their level of agreement with the statement: “In my company, we are aware of the following issues,” referring to inconvenient working hours, emotional labour, and poor work-life balance, which are the factors identified in international research as contributors to stress and burnout.

The responses reveal that irregular working hours stand out as the issue most widely recognised by companies, with a higher proportion of respondents expressing agreement. In contrast, emotional labour and poor work-life balance received similar but slightly lower levels of agreement.

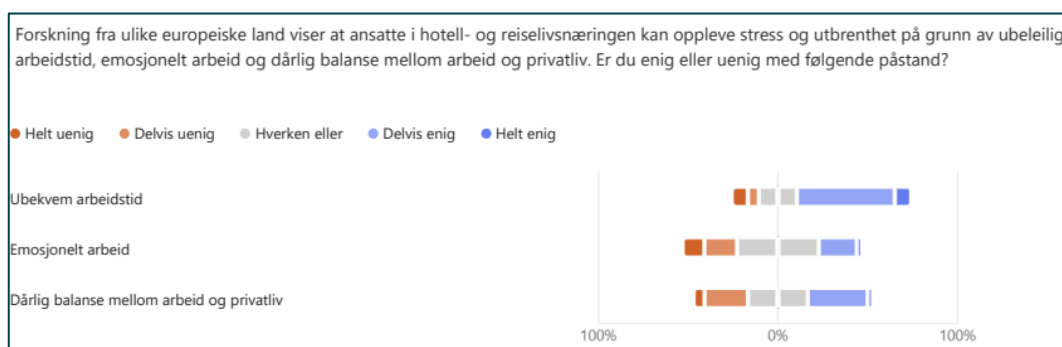


Figure 3.9: Awareness of workplace challenges in Gudbrandsdalen.

3.7 Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges

The respondents were asked whether their company actively works to reduce the negative effects of three psychosocial challenges: irregular working hours, emotional labour, and poor work-life balance. Most respondents address irregular working hours, as shown in Figure 3.10. Poor work-life balance and emotional labour were also addressed, but to a lesser extent, indicating that while these challenges are recognised, they may not be as actively targeted.

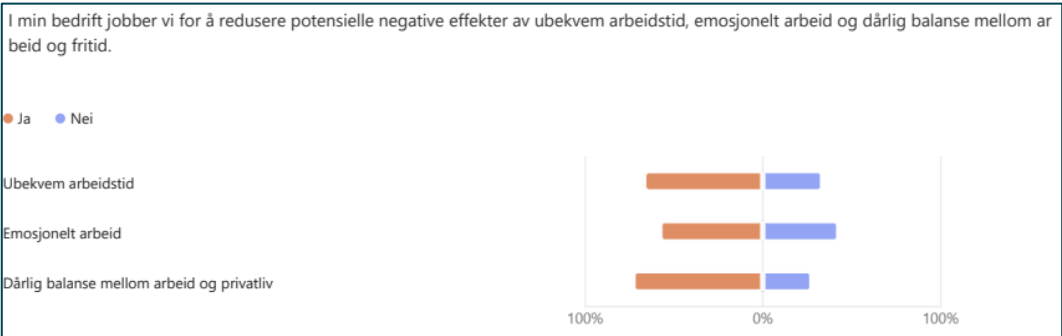


Figure 3.10: Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges in Gudbrandsdalen.

We also asked the respondents to share their positive experiences on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance. We received 16 open responses to the question, which we analysed by identifying common patterns. These are presented in Table 3.1 below:

Theme	Description	Mentions	Quotes (AI-generated translation from the original)
Flexibility and Employee Autonomy	Employees are given flexibility in hours, shift preferences, monthly hours, and seasonal scheduling; self-scheduling and adjustments for personal lives are emphasized.	8	“Flexible working hours regarding both monthly hours and time of day, especially during shoulder seasons.” (#9) “We are very helpful so that those who work with us get the shifts they want. Adjusted to other things in their life.” (#5)
Positive Framing of Irregular Hours	Rejecting the notion of “inconvenient” hours, reframing irregularity as an advantage or natural part of 24/7 service.	3	“Inconvenient/uncomfortable working hours is a negatively charged and incorrect term in the workplace. We disagree with the premise.” (#13) “Society is soon 24/7. Not everyone can work 8:00–15:00.” (#14)
Work–Life Balance	Taking children, leisure activities, and personal life into account when planning shifts; acknowledging challenges for employees with families.	3	“Try to maintain a culture offering flexible solutions and considering both children and the employee’s leisure activities.” (#15) “Experience greatest challenge with acceptance in the local community for work outside the standard ‘9–5’ norm. Especially difficult in relation to school

			and leisure activities for employees with children.” (#7)
Planning & Structured Scheduling	Use of formal shift plans, labour guidelines, rotation systems, and facilitation of schedule creation to ensure fairness.	4	“Facilitation and collaboration on creating shift schedules.” (#11) “Rotate shift schedules evenings/weekends.” (#17)
Compensation & Benefits	Overtime pay, supplements, above-tariff pay, housing, and financial recognition to support employees.	2	“Overtime pay, holiday supplements, pay above tariff, shift plan.” (#2) “Housing for employees who need it.” (#9)
Communication & Support Systems	Debriefing after incidents, open communication, switching customer contact to avoid negative impacts, and regular meetings with staff.	3	“Speak openly about it with individuals and groups. Debrief after incidents.” (#10) “We try to switch contact with customers who have a negative emotional impact on us.” (#4)
Enjoyable & Voluntary Work Culture	Focus on enjoyment, voluntary engagement, interest-driven participation, and positive framing of industry opportunities.	3	“Our focus is to make work enjoyable, of course. Follow up on all individual wishes.” (#6) “Everything is voluntary and driven by surplus energy and interest.” (#8)
Education & Industry Image	Linking irregular hours to educational initiatives and promoting the positive sides of hospitality to attract/retain workers.	2	“Working with education, try to focus on positive aspects of the industry’s opportunities.” (#12) “If we continue to ‘market’ bad working hours, we get lower application volumes.” (#13)

Table 3.1 Companies’ initiatives on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance (respondents from Gudbrandsdalen Innlandet, Norway).

3.8 Employees’ key competencies

Figure 3.11 presents the perspectives of Norwegian respondents on the most important competencies their employees need to ensure long-term sustainable operation. Respondents could select up to five competencies from a predefined list.

The most frequently selected competencies were:

- Customer service and interaction (26),

- Sustainability-related competencies (20),
- Food preparation and menu development (19),
- Communication skills (19),
- Management of daily operations (15),
- Cultural understanding (11), and
- IT and digital skills (7) were also recognised, though to a lesser extent.

Strategic leadership (5) and critical thinking (4) were the least demanded skills.

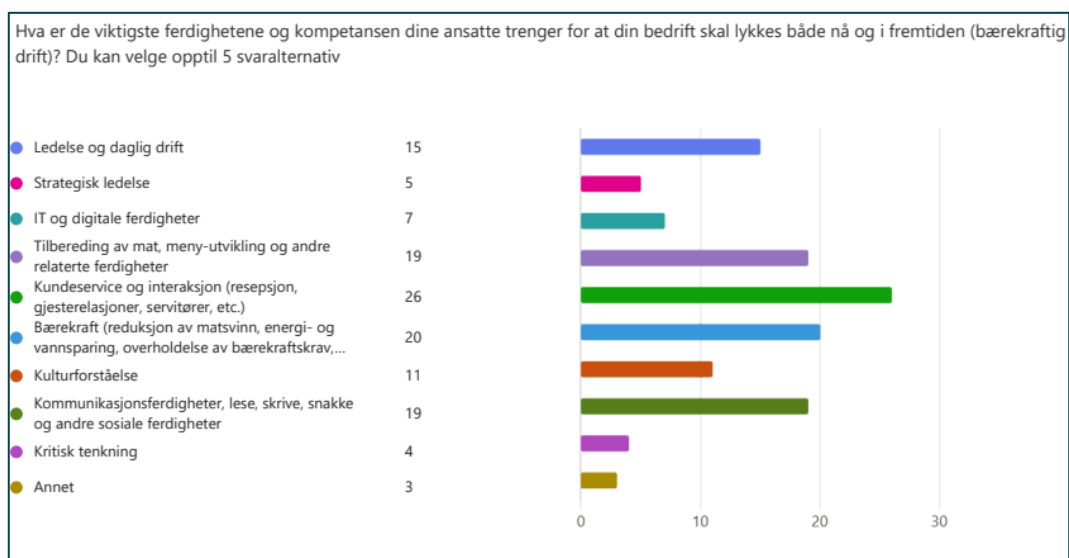


Figure 3.11: Employees key competencies Gudbrandsdalen

3.9 Perceived importance of formal education among employees

Figure 3.12 presents the Norwegian respondents' attitudes to the value of employing staff with formal vocational education, such as trained chefs, waiters, receptionists, and event managers. We used a five-point Likert scale to measure the statement: "It is valuable for my company to have employees with formal vocational education".

The distribution of responses shows a clear tendency toward agreement. Most respondents selected either partially agree or completely agree.

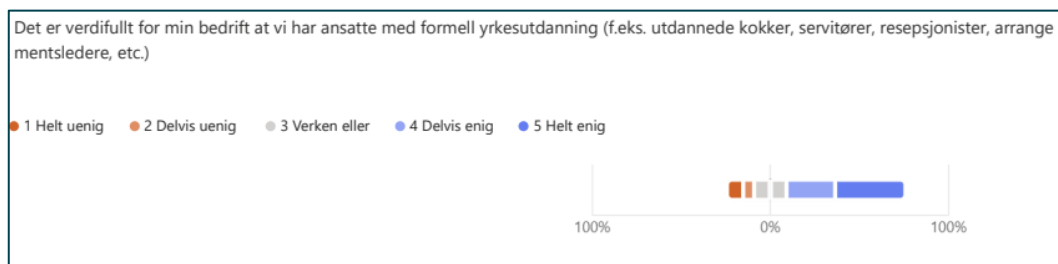


Figure 16: Perceived importance of formal education among employees in Gudbrandsdalen.

3.10 Wage differentiation based on formal education

Figure 3.13 illustrates the extent to which formal vocational education is associated with higher wages within Norwegian hospitality and tourism companies. A clear majority of respondents, 27 out of 33, indicated that employees with formal vocational qualifications receive higher salaries than their colleagues without such credentials. These findings suggest that vocational qualifications are not only valued in principle but also rewarded in practice.

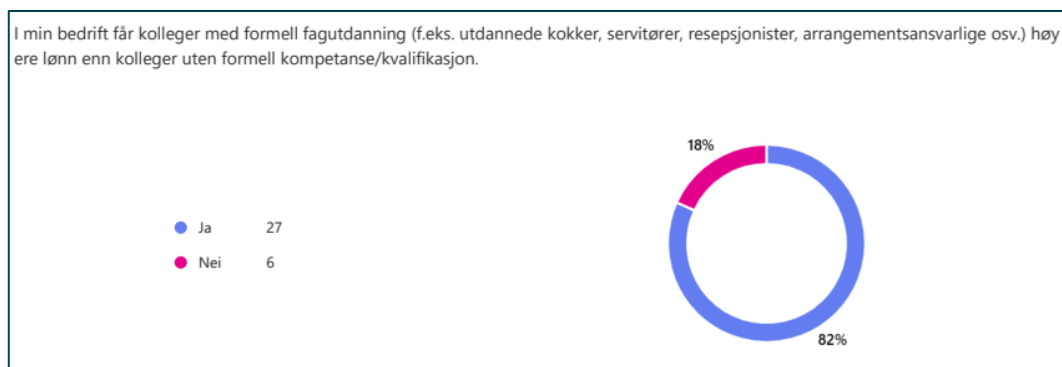


Figure 3.13: Wage differentiation based on formal education in Gudbrandsdalen.

3.11 Collaboration with local educational institutions

Figure 3.14 highlights the extent of existing collaboration between Norwegian respondents and regional schools or training offices. 21 indicated that their company currently engages in such partnerships, while 12 reported no collaboration. This points to potential opportunities for expanding collaboration within the sector.

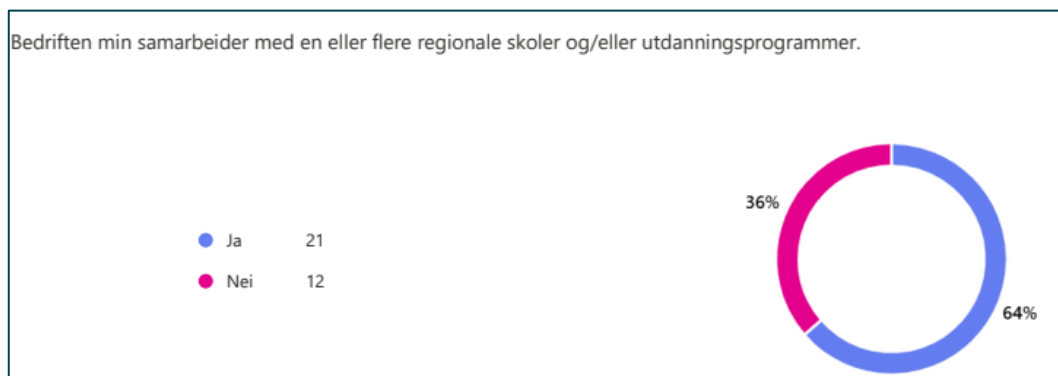


Figure 3.14: Collaboration with local educational institutions in Gudbrandsdalen.

3.12 Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions

Figure 3.15 provides further insight into the nature of collaboration between Norwegian companies and educational institutions. Among the 21 respondents who indicated that their company engages in such cooperation, the most common forms of collaboration are:

- ongoing partnerships related to internships or workplace placements (14),
- apprenticeship schemes or training offices, highlighting a strong emphasis on practical, work-based learning (12),
- guest lectures and company visits (9),
- participation in educational fairs and open house events (8).

Others are joint development projects (2) and skill competitions such as youth entrepreneurship or cooking contests (1 respondent). A small number (4 respondents) selected “Other,” indicating additional, unspecified forms of collaboration.

These results suggest that while collaboration is relatively widespread (as shown in Figure 3.14), it is primarily centred around practical training and direct workplace experience. This reflects a pragmatic approach to education-industry partnerships within the hospitality and tourism sector, where hands-on learning and vocational integration are prioritized.

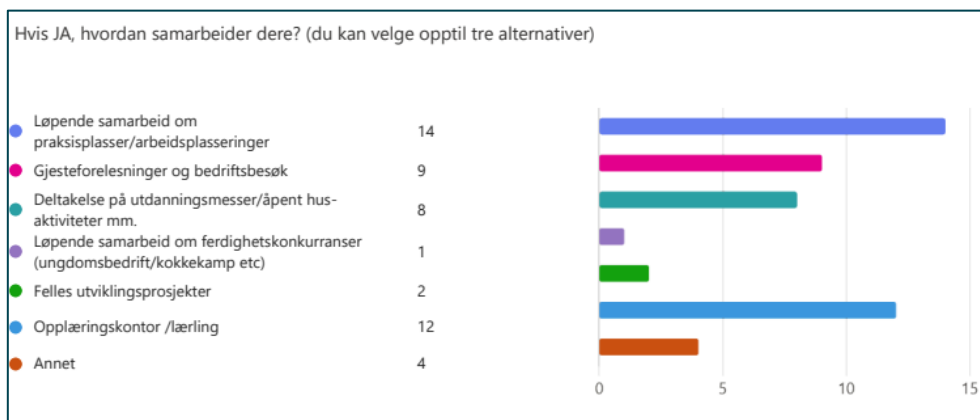


Figure 3.15: Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions in Gudbrandsdalen.

3.13 Interest in collaboration with educational institutions

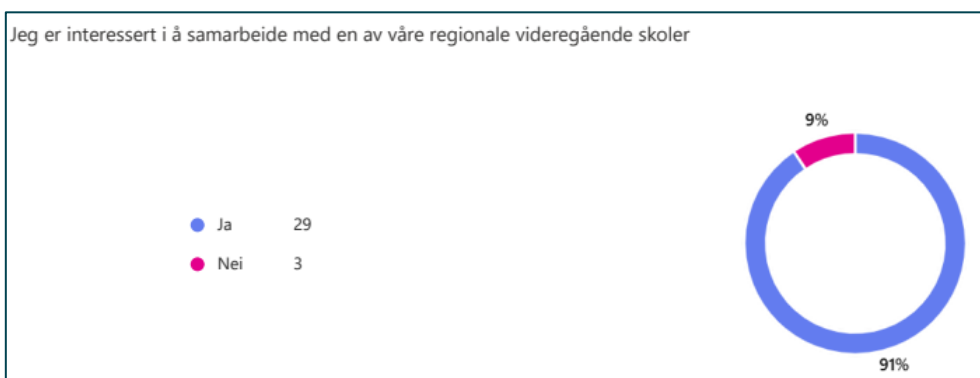


Figure 3.16: Interest in future collaboration with local educational institutions Gudbrandsdalen

Finally, Figure 3.16 further reinforces the positive attitude toward collaboration between companies and educational institutions. A striking 91% of respondents (n=29) expressed interest in cooperating with upper secondary schools, while only 9% (n=3) indicated no interest. Together, figures 3.14-3.16 suggest that there is substantial potential for expanding and deepening these partnerships across the sector.

4 Survey in Åland, Finland

In Åland, the survey was conducted in Swedish and distributed by the vocational upper secondary school Ålands yrkesgymnasium. The survey received 30 responses and 29 of the respondents are directly involved in staff recruitment and retention (Figure 4.1).

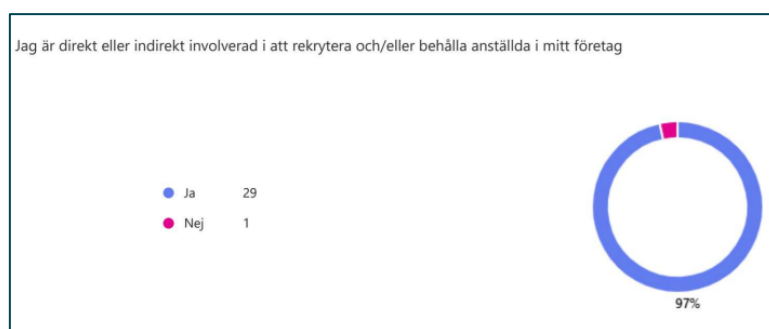


Figure 4.1: Respondents in Åland.

4.1 Respondents and company description

The respondents in Åland come from:

- the accommodation sector (20),
- food & beverage sector (16),
- tourism companies and tourist attractions (Figure 4.2).

With regards to company size:

- 66% of respondents represent small companies (1-10 employees),
- 17% from companies with 11 to 50 employees, and
- 17% from larger companies with over 50 employees (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.4 shows that Åland respondents are mostly represented by managers (12), owners (11), and supervisors (10).

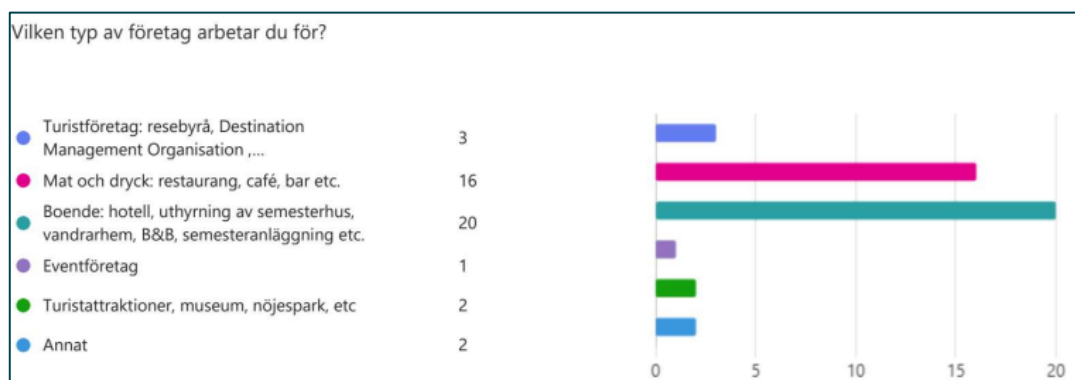


Figure 4.2: Åland respondents by type of company.

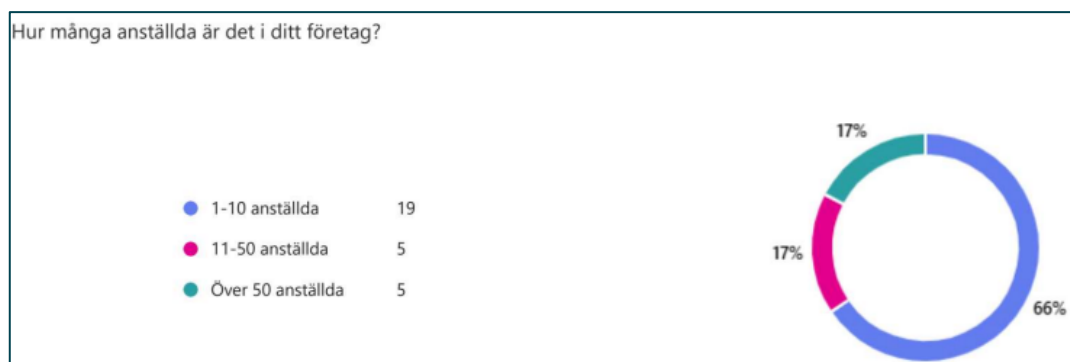


Figure 4.3: Company size, Åland.

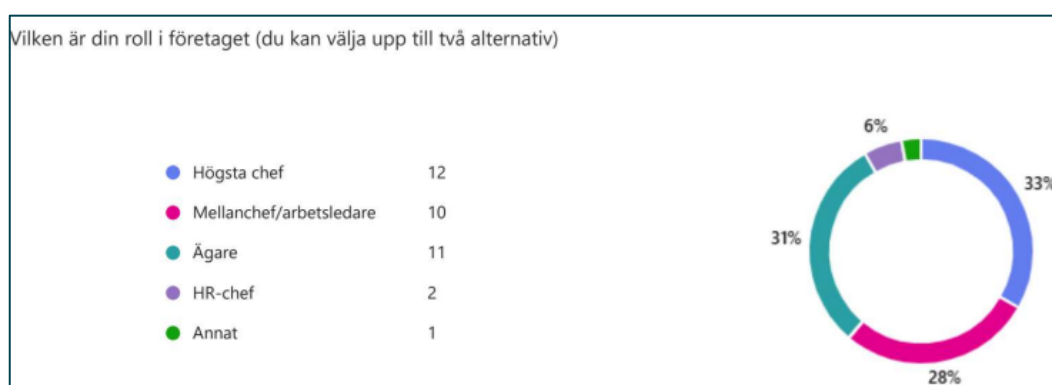


Figure 4.4: Respondents' professional role within the company in Åland.

4.2 Staff recruitment

The questionnaire included a section addressing recruitment challenges. We asked respondents if they had encountered problems in finding suitable employees within the last 18 months, and, where relevant, in which specific areas or positions these problems appeared (Figure 4.5). Among our Åland respondents, 80% either experienced, or partially experienced, challenges with recruiting the right workforce. These challenges were mostly experienced in the kitchen (11), housekeeping (9), and customer service (8) (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.517: Challenges in staff recruitment in Åland.

4.3 Channels used for staff recruitment

Figure 4.6 presents the recruitment channels most often used by Åland respondents:

- formal job search and recruitment platforms such as AMS, Nordjobb, and job fairs (21)
- word-of-mouth and professional networks (13) and
- social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (12), indicating a strong reliance on both digital tools and informal networks.
- company websites (10),
- collaboration with local educational institutions such as Ålands yrkesgymnasium or Högskolan Åland (3 respondents), and
- the use of recruiters or head-hunters (2 respondents).

Additionally, 4 respondents selected “Other,” unspecified recruitment strategies.

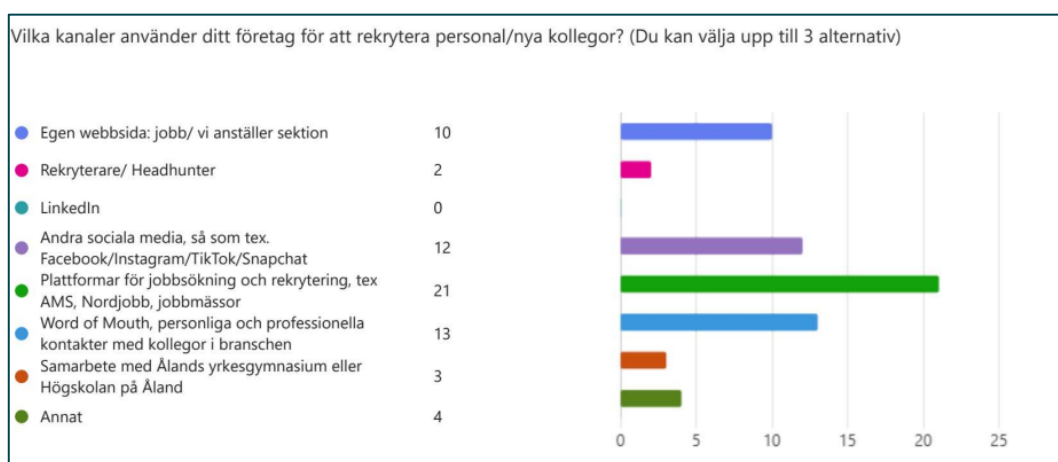


Figure 4.6: Channels used for staff recruitment in Åland.

4.4 Challenges in staff retainment

Retention of staff has emerged as a partial concern for several Åland respondents. When asked whether they had experienced challenges in retaining employees over the past 18 months, 15 respondents reported no such issues, while 6 confirmed difficulties and 8 indicated partial challenges.

Among those who had experienced full or partial retention problems, the most frequently cited reasons were:

- seasonal variation in business operations (14),

- stress or burnout (6 respondents).

“Other” unspecified reasons (7), and uncertainty about the cause of premature exit (8) indicates that the issue of premature exit is not completely transparent. Less commonly mentioned were dissatisfaction with salary levels (2 respondents), working conditions (1), and opportunities for professional development (1).

These responses suggest that structural and cyclical factors play a central role in employee turnover within the sector, with psychosocial aspects also contributing to retention challenges.

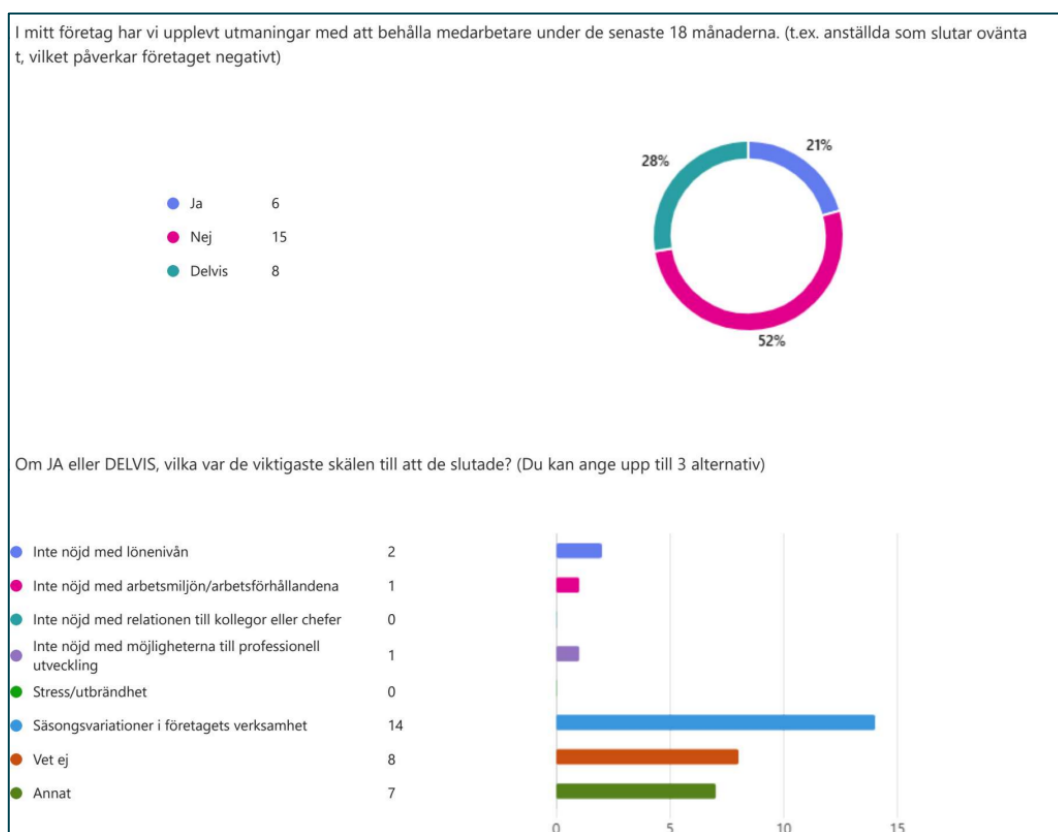


Figure 4.7: Challenges in staff retainment Åland

4.5 Initiatives for staff retainment

To address staff retention, hospitality and tourism companies in Åland report using a range of strategies, as illustrated in Figure 4.8. The most widely adopted measures are:

- the implementation of flexible work schedules (18), highlighting the importance of adaptability in working conditions.
- onboarding or mentoring programmes for new employees (11),
- social activities and team-building efforts (9),
- rewards, bonuses, or other benefits such as free meals or discounts (9),
- training and development courses (7 respondents)
- career development opportunities, such as job rotation (4 respondents).

Additionally, four respondents selected “Other”.

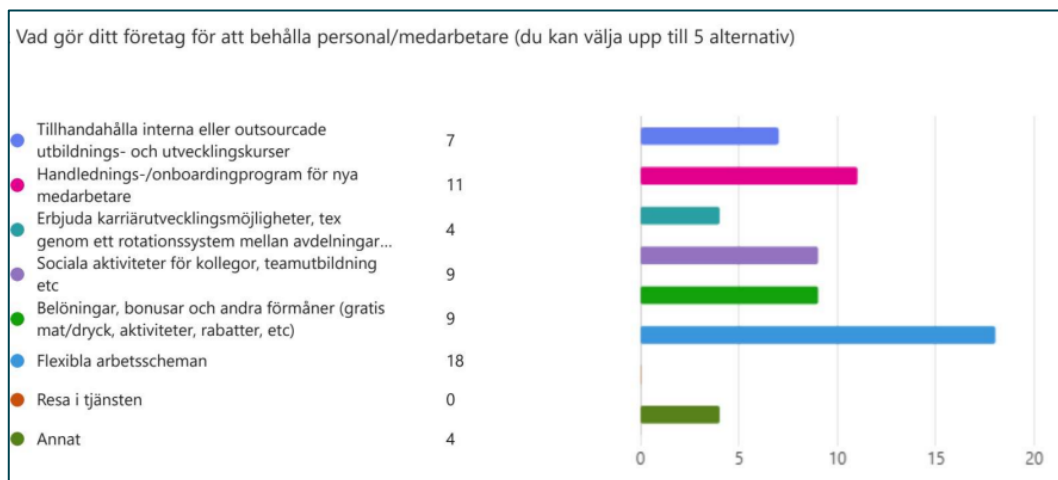


Figure 4.8: Initiatives for staff retainment Åland

4.6 Awareness of workplace challenges

The chart in Figure 4.9 presents respondents' levels of agreement with three statements concerning stress factors in the hospitality and tourism sector: irregular working hours, emotionally demanding work, and poor work-life balance. The responses are distributed across a five-point Likert scale ranging from “completely disagree” to “completely agree.”

For the statement on irregular working hours, most respondents expressed agreement, showing that irregular or demanding schedules are perceived as a source of stress.

Regarding emotionally demanding work, responses were more evenly distributed. This suggests that emotional labour is recognized as a relevant, though perhaps less dominant, stress factor.

In response to the statement about poor balance between work and private life, a clear majority again indicated agreement, with many selecting “partially agree” or “completely agree.” This points to work-life balance as a prominent concern among professionals in the sector.



Figure 4.9: Awareness of workplace challenges in Åland.

4.7 Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges

Efforts to mitigate work-related stress factors are addressed in Figure 4.10, which presents responses to whether companies actively work to reduce the negative effects of irregular working hours, emotionally demanding work, and poor work-life balance (“Yes”/ “No” for each category). Most companies report taking action to address all the three issues.

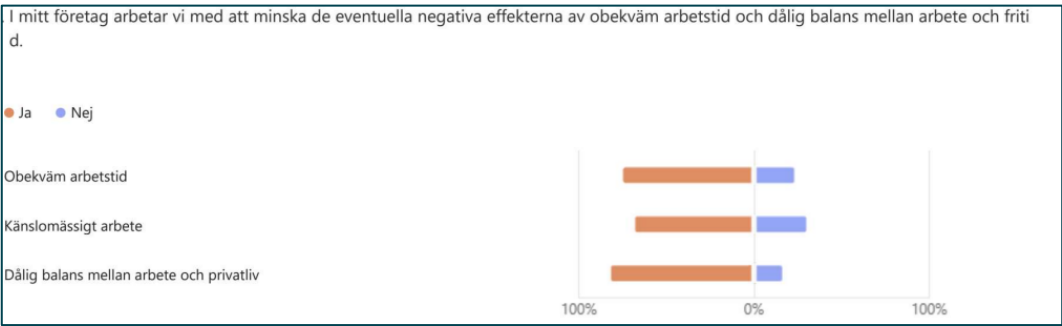


Figure 4.10: Organisational efforts to mitigate workplace challenges in Åland.

The respondents were also asked to share their positive experiences on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance. We received 16 open responses to the question, which we analysed by identifying common patterns. These are presented in Table 4.1 below:

Theme	Description	Mentions	Quotes (AI-generated translation from the original)
Work–Life Balance	Acceptance that inconvenient hours are unavoidable in 24/7 or seasonal operations; workload varies by season.	2	"If the company is open 24/7, it is difficult to avoid inconvenient working hours." (#1) "The restaurant industry is seasonal. Many inconvenient hours seasonally, and during low season there is more flexibility." (#2)
Nature of the Industry (24/7 & Seasonal)	Ensuring fairness by following labour law, setting maximum hours, and enforcing limits.	2	"By setting boundaries and following the law." (#4) "Max 40 hours of work per week." (#5)
Regulations & Boundaries	Listening to employee wishes, giving time off upon request, and allowing schedule approval.	2	"We listen a lot to how employees want to work and almost always give time off when they request it." (#7) "Staff can approve rotating schedules." (#9)
Flexibility & Employee Influence	Structuring shifts to balance demands: week-on/week-off systems, shortened shifts, rotation, or specific adjustments for heavy workloads.	3	"Working hours are often week-on/week-off or another 1:1 system." (#8) "In the restaurant (bar), we have shortened shifts as they are heavy work shifts." (#10)

Shift System Design	Noting that compared to owners' workload, employees' working hours are reasonable.	1	"Compared with how much the self-employed owner has to work to make it work, the employees have a reasonable workload." (3)
Employee vs. Owner Perspective	Acceptance that inconvenient hours are unavoidable in 24/7 or seasonal operations; workload varies by season.	2	"If the company is open 24/7, it is difficult to avoid inconvenient working hours." (1) / "The restaurant industry is seasonal. Many inconvenient hours seasonally, and during low season there is more flexibility." (2)

Table 4.1 Companies' initiatives on mitigating possible negative effects of unsocial working hours and lack of work-life balance (respondents from Åland).

4.8 Key employee competencies

When asked to identify the most important competencies required for their company's current and future success, respondents from the hospitality and tourism sector in Åland highlighted a range of skill areas, as shown in Figure 4.11. The most frequently selected competency was customer service and interaction, including roles such as reception, guest relations, and waiting staff, chosen by 22 respondents, underscoring the centrality of guest-facing skills in the industry.

Three other competencies were each selected by 17 respondents: IT and digital skills, food preparation and culinary expertise, and communication skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and social interaction. These results suggest a strong emphasis on both technical and interpersonal capabilities.

Other areas received fewer mentions: management of daily operations (7 respondents), sustainability-related skills such as waste reduction and energy efficiency (5 respondents), critical thinking (4), strategic leadership (2) and 4 chose "other". Notably, "cultural understanding" was not selected. A possible explanation could be that most tourists in the region come from Finland and Sweden and are perceived as culturally familiar.

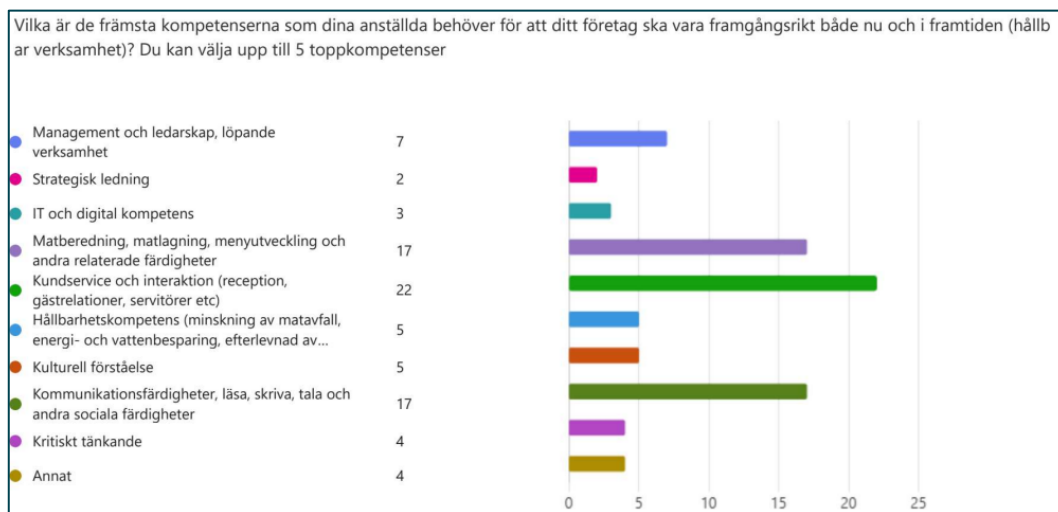


Figure 4.11: Key employee competencies Åland

4.9 Perceived importance of formal education among employees

The value of formal vocational education among employees is addressed in Figure 4.12. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement: “It is valuable for my company to have employees with formal vocational education (e.g., trained chefs, waiters, receptionists, event managers, etc.).” The responses were distributed across a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “do not agree at all” to “fully agree.”

Most respondents selected either “partially agree” or “fully agree,” indicating a strong recognition of the importance of vocational qualifications within the sector. Fewer respondents chose neutral or disagreeing positions, suggesting that formal training is seen as contributing positively to business operations and service quality.

This figure highlights a shared understanding among Åland-based hospitality and tourism professionals that vocational education plays a meaningful role in ensuring competence and professionalism in the workplace.

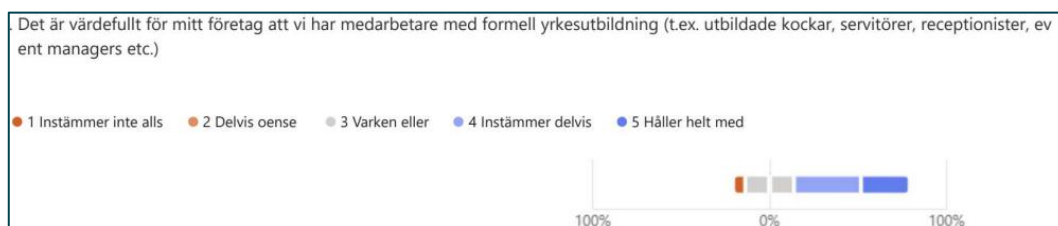


Figure 4.12: Perceived importance of formal education among employees in Åland.

4.10 Wage differentiation based on formal education

The relationship between formal vocational education and salary levels is addressed in Figure 4.13. Respondents were asked whether employees with formal qualifications, such as trained chefs, waiters, receptionists, or event managers, receive higher wages than colleagues without such credentials.

Most respondents (69%, n=20) answered “Yes,” while 31% (n=9) responded “No”. These results point to a general recognition of vocational education as a factor influencing wage structures, though not universally applied across all the surveyed companies, which we find unsettling.

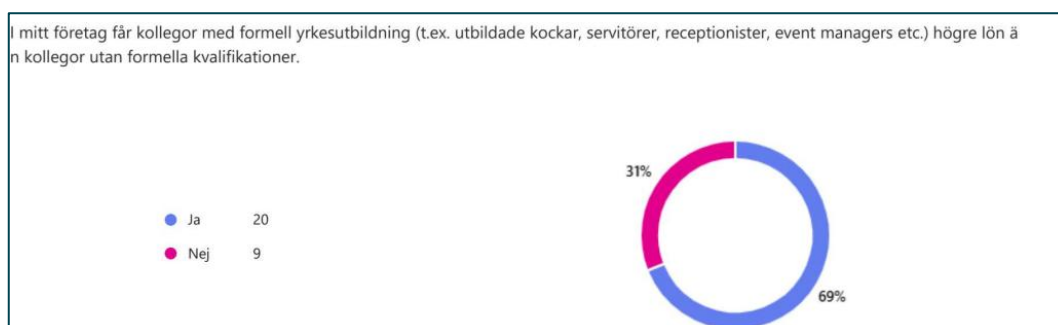


Figure 4.12: Wage differentiation based on formal education.

4.11 Collaboration with local educational institutions

Collaboration with local vocational institutions is the focus of Figure 4.13. Respondents were asked whether their company currently cooperates with one or more local vocational schools or programmes, such as Ålands yrkesgymnasium or Högskolan Åland.

Out of the total responses, 12 companies indicated that they engage in such collaboration, while 17 reported that they do not, indicating potential for strengthening ties between education and industry, particularly in areas such as training, recruitment, and curriculum relevance.

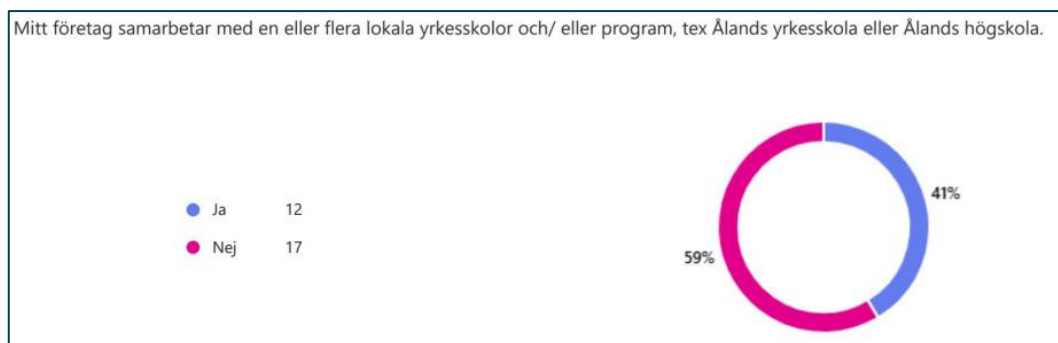


Figure 4.13: Collaboration with local educational institutions Åland

4.12 Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions

Among the companies that reported collaboration with local vocational institutions, Figure 4.15 provides insight into the specific forms that this cooperation takes. The most common type of engagement is ongoing collaboration related to internships or job placements, selected by 9 respondents. This indicates that practical, work-based learning remains the primary mode of interaction between companies and educational providers.

Other forms of collaboration include:

- guest lectures and company visits (6) and
- participation in education fairs or open house events (5).

Less frequently mentioned were joint development projects and apprenticeship agreements (each selected by 2 respondents), while no respondents reported involvement in talent or skills competitions. Additionally, 3 respondents selected "Other," indicating alternative or informal types of cooperation.

These results show that while only a portion of companies currently engage with local school, those that do tend to focus on practical training and direct interaction with students.

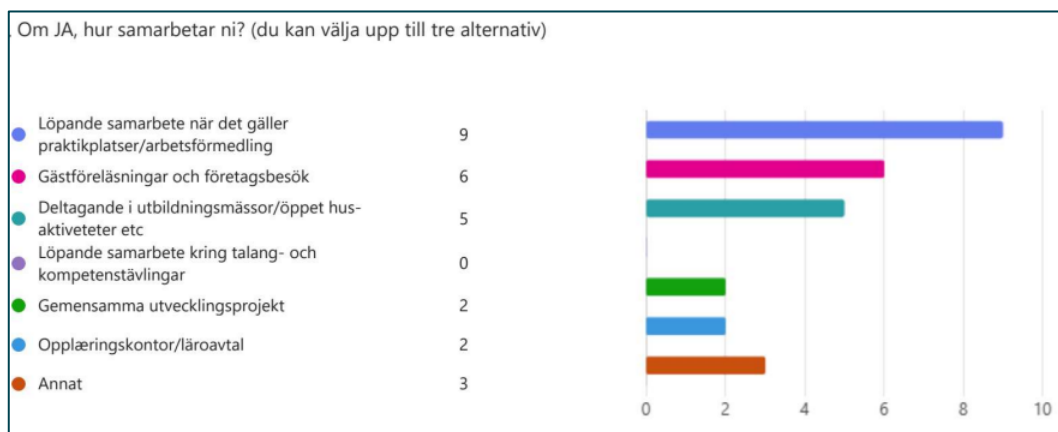


Figure 4.14: Forms of collaboration with local educational institutions Åland

4.13 Interest in collaboration with educational institutions

Interest in future collaboration with educational institutions is addressed in Figure 4.16. Respondents were asked whether they are interested in cooperating with Ålands yrkesgymnasium. The results show that 56% (n=14) answered “Yes,” while 44% (n=11) responded “No.”

This distribution suggests a moderate level of openness toward educational partnerships. While some companies are already engaged in internships, guest lectures, and educational events, the data also reveals that nearly half of the respondents remain uninterested in further collaboration. Together, these figures highlight both existing engagement and untapped opportunities for strengthening ties between the hospitality and tourism sector and vocational education providers in Åland.



Figure 4.15: Interest in future collaboration with educational institutions

5 Comparison and Discussion of Findings

The present comparison of survey responses from North Jutland, Gudbrandsdalen Innlandet, and Åland provides insights into shared challenges and practices within the hospitality and tourism sector across the three regions. While the overall themes show significant overlap, the analysis also highlights important contextual differences related to company size, recruitment difficulties, retention strategies, and the role of professional qualifications.

5.1 Respondent characteristics

Across all three surveys, most respondents represent the accommodation and food & beverage sector, i.e. “the backbone” of the hospitality industry. In North Jutland and Gudbrandsdalen, additional responses are reported from tourist attractions, whereas in Åland they come from other tourism-related companies, such as tourist attractions. Company size varies notably: The North Jutland responses mainly represent medium and large firms (11–50 employees or over 50), while responses from Gudbrandsdal and Åland are dominated by smaller companies of under 11 employees. This is expected since North Jutland includes the city of Aalborg where bigger tourism and hospitality companies are concentrated. As the survey specifically targeted top managers and owners, the majority of respondents in all three regions represent these roles, providing insights from the decision-makers in the industry.

5.2 Recruitment challenges & channels

The survey results indicate that recruitment challenges are persistent across all three regions. Most respondents report that they experience, or partly experience, challenges in finding the right staff within the last 18 months. As table 5.1 shows, most recruitment challenges are in the same departments and functions: kitchens, customer service, front office/reception, and housekeeping.

Department/ function	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Kitchen (chefs, cooks etc)	27	20	11
Customer service (waiters)	19	9	8
Housekeeping	12	12	9
Front office/ reception	12	7	5

Table 5.1 Recruitment challenges, comparison in the three regions

These findings are consistent with previous academic research and industry reports, usually conducted on national levels. Walmsley et al. (2020) note that Nordic hospitality is affected by seasonal labour demands and high staff turnover, contributing to difficulties in finding suitably qualified personnel. Gjerald et al. (2021) emphasise that the sector faces persistent challenges in attracting staff, particularly in operational roles with high customer contact.

Regarding recruitment channels, we see regional variation.

Preferred recruitment Channel	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Job portals	44	17	21
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat & TikTok)	45	23	12
Word of mouth	42	20	13
Own website	37	18	10
LinkedIn	27	6	0
Collaboration with relevant local education programmes	11	9	3

Table 5.2. Preferred recruitment channels across the three regions

As table 5.2 indicates, the top four recruitment channels are the same: national and Nordic job portals, own websites, social media (except LinkedIn) and, interestingly, word of mouth. The latter points to a close-knit industry, where “everybody knows everybody”.

It is noteworthy that only in North Jutland LinkedIn is a well-used channel; we expect that it is due to a higher percentage of bigger companies and a larger geographical area, represented in the Danish survey. And finally, recruitment through collaboration through relevant education programmes in the regions is not a popular channel, highlighting a gap between education institutions and the industry.

5.3 Employee Retention

Turning to the findings of our survey, most respondents in all three areas do not report significant retention challenges over the past 18 months. This contradicts the academic literature (e.g., Gjerald et al., 2021). However, where challenges are reported, seasonal fluctuations emerge as the primary barrier for retention, particularly in Åland.

Seasonality is a core feature of the Nordic hospitality and tourism sector (Walmsley et al., 2020; Gjerald et al., 2021). Ghani et al. (2022) also identify seasonal workloads as key determinants of employee turnover. Therefore, it being an often-cited barrier to employee retention is not surprising. However, we can argue that seasonality may also be used as an ‘easy’ external reason, outside the companies’ control.

Table 5.3 shows that the other two most cited barriers to employee retention are other unspecified reasons and the category “Don’t know”. It is surprising that companies who acutely lack workforce would not investigate the issue of an employee quitting. We can assume that this can be a sensitive question for many, pointing to internal reasons, which the respondents would rather not disclose.

It may also be difficult for employees to disclose the actual reason for quitting, even if the employers had asked. Especially if the reason is poor management or work culture (very few to no mentions). Wage level, though objectively relatively low,

seems to be a smaller barrier. If compared to the results of our focus -group interviews, we can confirm that our student participants prioritised other factors over wages, such as opportunities for growth and development, supportive leadership, and positive work culture.

Most cited barriers to employee retention	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Seasonality	16	13	14
Don't know	27	15	8
Other reasons (unspecified)	19	8	7
Dissatisfied with salary level	7	5	2
Dissatisfied with relations with colleagues or supervisors	6	1	0

Table 5.3. Most cited barriers to employee retention

When asked to elaborate on the successful employee retention initiatives, the companies in the three regions highlight similar areas. There are slight differences between what is prioritised in the three regions (Table 5.4) However, considering the small sample size, we cannot identify any statistically significant differences.

North Jutland	Gudbrandsdal	Åland
Employee benefits, Social activities and team-building, Training programmes, introduction courses for new employees (onboarding).	Flexible working hours and scheduling, Social activities, Employee benefits, and training.	Flexible scheduling, Introduction programmes (onboarding), Social activities, and Employee benefits.

Table 5.4. Retention activities as prioritised in the three geographical regions

The variation across companies and regions reflects what Saad (2013) highlighted earlier: that retention strategies need to be tailored to local labour market conditions, generational preferences, and organisational practices, with flexibility, social engagement, and training consistently identified as effective measures.

5.4 Awareness of working conditions and well-being

Our survey results reveal that respondents in North Jutland and Åland report a high

level of awareness regarding irregular working hours, emotional labour, and work-life balance challenges, i.e. structural characteristics of the industry. Among our Gudbrandsdal respondents, the awareness of emotional labour and work-life balance is comparatively lower. However, no significant comparisons can be made due to small sample size.

Across all three regions, most respondents indicate that their businesses actively implement measures to mitigate the negative effects of irregular working hours and insufficient work-life balance. Table 5.5 summarizes the initiatives and positive experiences the 60 respondents from the three regions shared.

For breakdown by individual region, see Table 2.1 (North Jutland), Table 3.1 (Gudbrandsdalen) and Table 4.1 (Åland).

Theme	Description	Mentions
Planning & Structured Scheduling	Planning, structured shift allocation, rotation systems, reducing strain (e.g., fewer consecutive shifts, shorter/longer shift systems).	18
Flexibility & Employee Autonomy	Flexibility in hours, shift swaps, self-scheduling, time-off on request, accommodating personal life, seasonal flexibility.	20
Work-Life Balance & Well-Being	Supporting balance through shorter shifts, extra breaks, gratitude, well-being meetings, assigning “good” shifts, ensuring social/family time.	17
Nature of the Industry (24/7 & Seasonal)	Recognition that irregular or “inconvenient” hours are inevitable in tourism/hospitality due to seasonality and 24/7 service.	10
Culture & Communication	Building positive culture, teamwork, shared values, social interaction, meals, open communication, debriefing.	9
Staffing Strategies (Students, Substitutes, Matching Profiles)	Use of students, substitutes, and tailored hiring to cover irregular shifts and reduce strain on permanent staff.	9
Positive Framing of Irregular Hours	Reframing irregular hours as an advantage or part of modern 24/7 society; avoiding negative terminology.	6

Theme	Description	Mentions
Collective Agreements & Formal Structures	Reliance on labour law, collective agreements, committees, and leadership responsibility to regulate hours and protect staff.	6
Compensation & Benefits	Financial recognition through overtime pay, supplements, above-tariff wages, and provision of benefits (e.g., housing).	3
Event-Specific Adaptation	Adjustments for large/multi-day events, such as extra staffing during and reduced hours after.	2
Education & Industry Image	Promoting positive aspects of the industry, avoiding negative framing, and linking to education/training.	2

Table 5.5 Successful retention initiatives across the three regions.

This aligns with recommendations from Saad (2013) who highlights the importance of organizational strategies such as flexible scheduling, social engagement, and training programmes to support employee well-being and reduce the risk of stress and burnout. The qualitative inputs from our respondents are useful, as they can serve as best practices and inspiration to the industry, and therefore an important project deliverable.

5.5 Competence requirements and professional qualifications

Across all three surveys, the most required competences were customer service and interaction with guests, communication skills, culinary skills and daily management (Table 5.6). This pattern is an important finding for our project, as it has direct implications for which focus areas respective education programmes can prioritise, and which competence gaps to close.

While customer service and culinary skills were expected results (considering the challenges with recruiting kitchen and service personnel (see Section 5.2), the demand for daily management and supervision competences was surprising. The demand for communication skills had been already reported in Norway (Eben & Spetalen (2020), but our findings confirm it as a persistent gap across the three regions.

Another surprising result is that sustainability emerges as a central competence in Gudbrandsdalen, mentioned by 20 respondents out of 33. It may be the consequence of the strategic work of destination management organisations in the recent years to develop a sustainable profile.

Most required competences	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Customer service & guest interaction	52	26	22
Communication skills	39	19	17
Cooking & food preparation	33	19	17
Management, daily operations	34	15	7
Cultural understanding	26	11	5
IT & digital skills	16	7	3
Sustainability skills	15	20	5

Table 5.6 Most required competences across the three regions

Regarding formal education, most respondents agree that formal professional qualifications bring value to their companies. Although the majority report that formal qualifications are rewarded with higher salaries, we have several concerns about these statements. First, that a substantial number of companies do not make this distinction. Second, that some respondents may not have answered truthfully (but have given a more socially acceptable response).

In my company, employees with formal qualifications get a higher salary.	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Yes	47 (75%)	27 (82%)	20 (69%)
No	16 (25%)	6 (18%)	9 (31%)

Table 5.7 Employees with formal qualifications receive higher salaries – numbers & percentages.

Finally, we have evidence from our workshop in Åland, that tourism and hospitality job descriptions for the summer season of 2025 in the area do not require formal education or qualification as a skill. The focus-group interviews we had conducted in the qualitative phase of this project also point to lack of transparency with regards to salaries in the Danish tourism and hospitality industry. Some students had

expressed frustration at not knowing their ‘market value’, even with holding a formal education.¹ This finding points to a significant gap in between the industry and the relevant education programmes to be addressed and closed.

5.6 Cooperation with educational institutions

Cooperation with local vocational and professional schools is reported as common in all three countries, with a clear emphasis on ongoing partnerships regarding internships and work placements. Other forms of cooperation differ slightly: Danish and Finnish businesses emphasise guest lectures and company visits, while Norwegian firms highlight cooperation with training offices and apprenticeships. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents expressed interest in continued or expanded cooperation with respective regional educational institutions, suggesting a shared commitment to bridging gaps between industry and education. This finding is a positive one, giving us inspiration for future action.

In my company, we are interested in future cooperation with regional schools or education programmes.	North Jutland, Denmark (63)	Gudbrandsdal, Norway (33)	Åland, Finland (29)
Yes	35 (58%)	21 (64%)	14 (56%)
No	25 (42%)	12 (36%)	11 (44%)

Table 5.7 Employees with formal qualifications receive higher salaries – numbers & percentages.

¹ To further validate this evidence, job descriptions in the three regions can be compared and analysed.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of survey responses from North Jutland, Gudbrandsdalen, and Åland provides insights into the shared challenges and practices within the Nordic hospitality and tourism sector, while also highlighting region-specific nuances. Despite differences in company size, labour market conditions, etc., the surveys reveal several common themes shaping recruitment, retention, and workplace practices.

A central finding is the persistence of recruitment challenges, particularly in kitchens, customer-facing roles, and housekeeping. These difficulties are consistent with existing research pointing to the sector's reliance on seasonal labour, high turnover, and the struggle to attract suitably qualified staff. Recruitment channels overlap across the three regions, with job portals, own websites, social media, and word of mouth dominating. The limited use of educational institutions as recruitment partners indicates a gap between industry and education that requires attention.

In terms of employee retention, most respondents did not report persistent problems, though seasonal fluctuations emerged as the main barrier. This finding, however, may be an easy explanation used to downplay internal causes of turnover, such as management or workplace culture, which the survey results rarely acknowledge but which our earlier qualitative focus-group interviews with students suggest may play a larger role. At the same time, retention strategies reported by companies align with academic literature, highlighting flexibility, supportive leadership, and social engagement as effective measures.

Respondents across the regions demonstrated significant awareness of working conditions and well-being challenges (i.e., irregular working hours, poor work-life balance and emotional labour). Numerous initiatives are in place to mitigate these structural issues, from flexible scheduling to staff well-being activities. While awareness varied slightly across regions, the overall picture suggests that companies recognise these challenges and take active steps to address them.

The analysis also reveals clear competence needs across the sector. Customer service, culinary skills, and communication skills dominate, but daily management

competences also stand out as a surprising demand. The emphasis on sustainability in Gudbrandsdalen may be the consequence of a focussed effort from destination management organisations and businesses in the recent years to develop a sustainable profile. While most respondents acknowledge the value of formal qualifications, inconsistencies in salary recognition expose a troubling gap between education systems and industry practices.

The findings on cooperation with education providers are encouraging. Internships and placements remain the most common form of collaboration, but there is a considerable interest in strengthening ties through guest lectures, company visits, etc. This willingness suggests that the industry partially acknowledges the importance of bridging competence gaps and is open to deeper partnerships with education.

The results confirm the structural characteristics of the Nordic hospitality and tourism sector (seasonality, irregular hours, and high employee turnover), but also highlight promising practices in flexibility, work-life balance initiatives, and education-industry collaboration. Closing the gap between formal education and industry needs, while ensuring greater transparency in career pathways and rewards, can be seen as a path for improving recruitment and retention. By addressing these challenges collectively, the Nordic regions can strengthen their hospitality and tourism industries and secure a more sustainable workforce for the future.

7 References

Eben, B., & Spetalen, H. (2020). Nye læreplaner i utdanningsprogrammet restaurant-og matfag-Kompetanse for fremtiden? *Scandinavian Journal of Vocations in Development*, 5, 1, 71–88

Ghani, B., Zada, M., Memon, K. R., Ullah, R., Khattak, A., Han, H., ... & Araya-Castillo, L. (2022). Challenges and strategies for employee retention in the hospitality industry: A review. *Sustainability*, 14(5), 2885.

Gjerald, O., Dagsland, Å. H. B., & Furunes, T. (2021). 20 years of Nordic hospitality research: a review and future research agenda. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 21(1), 37-48.

Saad, S. K. (2013). Contemporary challenges of human resource planning in tourism and hospitality organizations: A conceptual model. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 12(4), 333-354.

Walmsley, A, Åberg, K., Blinnikka, P. & Jóhannesson, G. (2020). *Tourism Employment in Nordic Countries: Trends, Practices and Opportunities*. Palgrave Macmillan



Co-funded by
the European Union