

Staff Shortages in Hospitality: A Case Study of Rossington Hall

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Executive Summary

This report examines the critical issue of staff shortages at Rossington Hall, a historic luxury venue in rural Doncaster, UK. The study aims to understand the causes of these staffing challenges, evaluate their impact on the hall's operational performance and guest satisfaction, and propose effective strategies to mitigate these issues. Through a combination of academic research, placement observations, and guest feedback, the study provides a detailed analysis of how workforce shortages affect Rossington Hall's short- and long-term success.

The findings highlight that staff shortages at Rossington Hall stem from multiple interlinked factors. Low wages, Brexit-related labour reductions, and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly disrupted the labour market, particularly in rural areas. The hall's location and limited financial resources make it difficult to recruit and retain skilled employees, exacerbating the problem. These challenges manifest as delayed services, inconsistent operational standards, and employee burnout, all of which contribute to reduced guest satisfaction. Negative guest reviews, such as complaints about delayed room preparation and lapses in cleanliness, further underscore the urgency of addressing these issues.

The dissertation offers several recommendations to address staffing challenges at Rossington Hall. Improving recruitment by building partnerships with local colleges and vocational schools could create a reliable talent pipeline. Offering structured career development opportunities, such as training programs and mentorship, could enhance retention by encouraging employees to view their roles as long-term career prospects. The adoption of technological solutions, such as automated booking systems and rota management tools, could alleviate staff workloads, allowing them to focus on high-value guest services. Furthermore, addressing the hall's rural isolation through transport allowances and local recruitment campaigns could attract a broader range of applicants. Rebranding hospitality as a rewarding and dynamic career choice is also suggested as a longer-term strategy to attract younger workers.

By implementing these measures, Rossington Hall can stabilise its workforce, enhance service quality, and safeguard its reputation as a premier luxury destination. The findings of this study also provide broader insights into the challenges facing the hospitality sector, particularly for small, independent venues, and offer practical strategies that can be adapted to similar contexts.

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Introduction

Rossington Hall is a historic luxury venue situated in the rural town of Doncaster, South Yorkshire. Surrounded by beautiful countryside, the hall combines stunning architecture with a unique charm, offering an idyllic setting for weddings, corporate events, and private stays. As a smaller, independently owned business, Rossington Hall plays an important role in the local hospitality sector, providing bespoke services that set it apart from larger chains. However, like many venues of its kind, it faces significant challenges, particularly in managing its workforce and maintaining service quality amidst rising operational pressures.

Staff shortages have emerged as one of the most critical issues at Rossington Hall, reflecting a wider crisis across the hospitality industry. Over recent years, external factors such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have reshaped the labour market, creating widespread difficulties in recruitment and retention. For Rossington Hall, these challenges are further exacerbated by its rural location, limited access to skilled workers, and financial constraints, all of which make it difficult to compete with larger hospitality providers.

This dissertation explores the issue of staff shortages at Rossington Hall, focusing on three key themes: the causes of these shortages, their impact on the hall's operations and guest satisfaction, and potential strategies to address the problem. Drawing on academic research, a detailed case study, and insights gained during placement, this study examines how staff shortages affect both the hall's day-to-day running and its long-term sustainability.

The findings of this research aim to provide practical recommendations that Rossington Hall can implement to improve its staffing levels and employee satisfaction. By addressing these challenges, the hall can continue to deliver the high-quality, personalised service it is known for, safeguarding its reputation as a luxury destination. This study also offers broader insights into the staffing crisis within the hospitality sector, contributing to a deeper understanding of how small, independent venues can adapt to an evolving labour market.

Literature Review

Introduction to Staffing Challenges in the Hospitality Sector

The hospitality industry has long faced the challenge of maintaining a stable workforce, an issue that has become especially critical over the last decade. Studies suggest that staff shortages—worsened by the demands of hospitality work, low wages, and seasonality—pose significant risks to operational efficiency and service quality, particularly in high-end establishments (Baum, 2015; Walmsley & Partington, 2019). For luxury hotels, where exceptional service and personalised experiences are essential, these staffing issues become even more pronounced, creating operational difficulties that are far from trivial (Jiang & Tribe, 2021). This literature review explores the key causes of staff shortages in hospitality, their operational impacts, and strategies suggested in recent studies, with a focus on luxury hotels.

Causes and Contributing Factors to Labour Shortages

Multiple studies identify interlinked factors driving labour shortages in the hospitality sector. Hospitality roles are often demanding, with limited financial incentives and career progression, which can make recruitment and retention challenging (Baum & Hai, 2019). Even in luxury hotels, where pay rates may be somewhat higher than in budget hotels, jobs are still characterised by physically and emotionally taxing work, which deters many potential employees (Cheng & Brown, 2018). Compounding this, the seasonal nature of hospitality work creates an element of job instability, further limiting its appeal (Wood, 2018).

Another significant factor is demographic shifts, particularly in Europe, where an ageing workforce and reduced inflow of younger workers have made staffing more competitive (Jiang & Tribe, 2021). In the UK, policy changes following Brexit have had a notable impact, reducing the pool of foreign workers who previously played a crucial role in the hospitality workforce (Goh & Lee, 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this exodus, as many hospitality workers moved to other sectors that offer better working conditions and stability (Baum, 2020). Together, these factors underscore the complex nature of labour shortages in the sector, driven not only by industry practices but also by wider economic and social trends.

Impact of Staff Shortages on Hotel Operations and Service Quality

The impact of labour shortages is felt acutely within luxury hotels, where high service standards are expected. Studies indicate that insufficient staffing levels often lead to increased workloads for remaining employees, which contributes to stress, burnout, and further turnover (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). For example, Kim et al. (2019) found that understaffed luxury hotels often suffer from delayed service, compromised cleanliness, and reduced service offerings—all of which can harm guest satisfaction and loyalty.

In luxury hotels, these issues are particularly damaging due to the emphasis on personalised service. Lu and Adler (2021) suggest that when hotels are forced to lower their service standards or increase prices due to limited staff, they risk damaging their reputation and reducing customer loyalty.

Research shows that even small lapses in service quality in luxury environments can significantly impact guest perceptions, underscoring the importance of maintaining a well-trained and adequately sized workforce (Cheng & Brown, 2018).

Internally, staff shortages disrupt the operational flow, from housekeeping and front desk services to food and beverage offerings. High turnover and insufficient staffing affect consistency in training and development, which can lead to a lack of standardised service and reduce employee cohesion (Jiang & Tribe, 2021). As Gursoy and Chi (2020) note, understaffed luxury hotels also struggle to implement innovations or respond to changing guest preferences, further affecting their competitiveness. Thus, maintaining optimal staffing levels is not merely an operational necessity but a critical component of a luxury hotel's competitive advantage.

Strategies to Mitigate Staffing Issues

Given these challenges, researchers have examined a variety of approaches to improving recruitment and retention, particularly in the high-demand environment of luxury hospitality. One promising avenue is the adoption of employee engagement and development initiatives. Studies show that competitive pay, benefits, and career development opportunities are associated with improved job satisfaction and lower turnover (Youn et al., 2021). In luxury hotels specifically, where staff are expected to deliver a high standard of service, investing in professional development can help cultivate loyalty and improve retention rates (Walmsley & Partington, 2019).

Flexibility in work schedules and enhanced work-life balance initiatives are also essential. Goh and Lee (2020) found that offering flexible scheduling can make hospitality roles more appealing, particularly to younger workers and those with family responsibilities. Additionally, luxury hotels are increasingly turning to technology, such as automated check-in systems, to reduce pressure on staff and allow employees to focus on service quality (Lu & Adler, 2021). Automating routine tasks can relieve some of the operational strain and enable hotels to allocate resources to high-touch areas of service, even when staffing levels are less than ideal.

Recent studies also highlight the importance of fostering a positive workplace culture. Baum and Hai (2019) argue that a supportive and inclusive workplace environment enhances employee morale, which is crucial for reducing turnover. Involving staff in decision-making processes has been shown to increase job satisfaction and loyalty, suggesting that luxury hotels could benefit from adopting a more participative management style (Kim et al., 2019). Such measures can foster a stronger sense of belonging, further helping luxury hotels retain skilled workers and maintain service standards.

Synthesis and Identification of Research Gaps

While there is considerable literature on strategies to combat staff shortages, specific gaps remain in understanding how these solutions function in the long term, particularly within the unique demands of luxury hotels. Baum (2019) points out that luxury hotels require distinct approaches to employee engagement and retention, yet much of the existing research is focused on general hospitality. Furthermore, few studies examine the long-term impact of these strategies, leaving it unclear whether short-term gains translate into sustained improvements over time.

A further gap lies in examining the geographical variations in staffing challenges. Labour shortages in the UK, for instance, may differ significantly from those in other markets due to factors such as Brexit and local employment trends. Future research could benefit from exploring these regional specificities, providing both scholars and industry practitioners with a clearer understanding of the strategies that work best in different contexts.

In conclusion, staff shortages present a persistent and multifaceted challenge in the hospitality industry. Low wages, high turnover, and demanding working conditions have contributed to these shortages, with luxury hotels facing heightened pressures due to their high service standards and guest expectations. Although strategies such as improved employee engagement, flexible scheduling, and technological integration offer potential solutions, further research is needed to explore how these interventions can be adapted to the unique demands of luxury hospitality. Understanding the long-term impacts of these strategies and their applicability across different regions will be crucial for the sector's sustainable development.

Methodology

The methodology of this study employs a case study approach, a research strategy particularly useful for exploring complex, real-life issues within their specific contexts. A case study is a qualitative method that focuses on an in-depth investigation of a single subject or a small number of subjects. As Yin (2018) explains, this methodology is particularly suited to answering "how" and "why" questions, making it an ideal approach for understanding nuanced issues such as staffing challenges in the hospitality sector.

This methodology incorporates multiple data sources to provide a well-rounded understanding of the subject. Data collection will include testimonials from online platforms, which offer unfiltered insights into public and employee sentiments. This is closely aligned with netnography (or online ethnography), which Kozinets (2015) describes as an effective way of analysing social interactions and opinions shared in digital spaces. By examining feedback from online reviews and social media platforms, this study aims to uncover themes related to employee and guest experiences.

In addition to online data, academic resources accessed through the UWTSD library will form a key component of the research. Journals, articles, and academic texts will provide foundational knowledge and support the theoretical framework of the study. These resources will also be instrumental in contextualising findings, ensuring they are aligned with broader trends and insights within the hospitality industry. For example, sources discussing workforce management and employee engagement will provide a basis for understanding the causes and implications of staff shortages.

A significant element of this methodology involves personal observations and reflective writing based on my placement experience. Reflective writing is a qualitative technique that captures individual insights and experiences, offering an insider perspective on the subject. Merriam (2009) highlights the value of such reflections in case study research, noting that they can reveal subtleties and dynamics that might be overlooked in structured data collection. During my placement, I observed how staffing challenges influenced day-to-day operations and employee morale. These observations will complement the other data sources by providing first-hand accounts of how the phenomenon unfolds in practice.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this approach. Case studies, while rich in detail, often lack generalisability due to their focus on a specific context (Stake, 1995). Although the findings will provide valuable insights, they may not be applicable to all hospitality organisations. Furthermore, relying on online testimonials and reflective writing introduces the potential for subjectivity. To address this, triangulation—comparing data across multiple sources—will be used to ensure the findings are balanced and credible (Bryman, 2016). By combining personal reflections, academic literature, and online data, this methodology aims to mitigate bias and enhance the study's reliability.

In conclusion, the chosen methodology integrates diverse data sources to explore staffing challenges in a comprehensive manner. By combining online testimonials, academic resources, and personal observations, it captures a rich and multi-dimensional perspective on the issue. While recognising its limitations, this approach seeks to provide meaningful insights into a critical challenge facing the hospitality sector.

Case of Study Discussion

Rossington Hall, situated on Great North Road in Rossington, Doncaster, is a historic Victorian mansion that has been transformed into a luxury venue offering accommodation, fine dining, and event hosting. Surrounded by the tranquil South Yorkshire countryside, the hall provides a retreat for guests seeking unique and memorable experiences. From romantic weddings to private celebrations and corporate events, it caters to a diverse clientele who value exclusivity and heritage (Rossington Hall, 2023).

Facilities and Offerings

The hall boasts 21 individually designed bedrooms, each combining period elegance with modern luxury. Unlike chain hotels, where rooms are uniform, the bespoke nature of Rossington Hall's accommodations creates a distinctive and intimate atmosphere for guests. The venue's dining experience is equally notable, featuring a menu inspired by seasonal, locally sourced ingredients. Such a focus on regional produce reflects the growing demand for sustainable and authentic culinary experiences in the hospitality sector (Wood, 2018).

Beyond its interiors, the estate features expansive gardens and meticulously maintained lawns, ideal for outdoor events. These grounds offer a stunning backdrop for wedding photography and al fresco receptions, enhancing the venue's appeal as a premier choice for weddings and special events. The combination of historical charm and luxurious amenities sets Rossington Hall apart as a venue of exceptional character (Coolstays, 2023).



(Rossington Hall, n.d.)

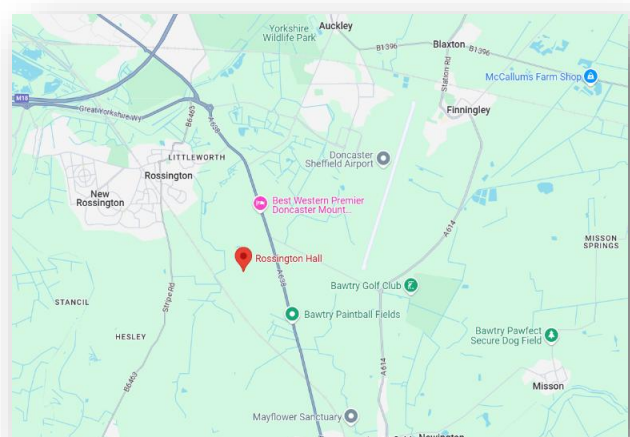


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Location and Cultural Setting

Situated just six miles south of Doncaster town centre, Rossington Hall benefits from its proximity to key transport links, including the M18 and A1, making it easily accessible for both local and international visitors (Google Maps, 2023). The hall's rural setting provides tranquillity, while its closeness to Doncaster ensures that guests can enjoy both relaxation and convenience.

The hall's Victorian heritage adds to its charm. Originally built in the 19th century, Rossington Hall retains much of its period architecture and decor, offering guests an immersive historical experience. Its location within South Yorkshire, a region celebrated for its rich cultural history and scenic beauty, further enhances its allure. Nearby attractions, such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Park and Doncaster Racecourse, provide additional activities for visitors, adding to the overall experience (Visit Yorkshire, 2023).



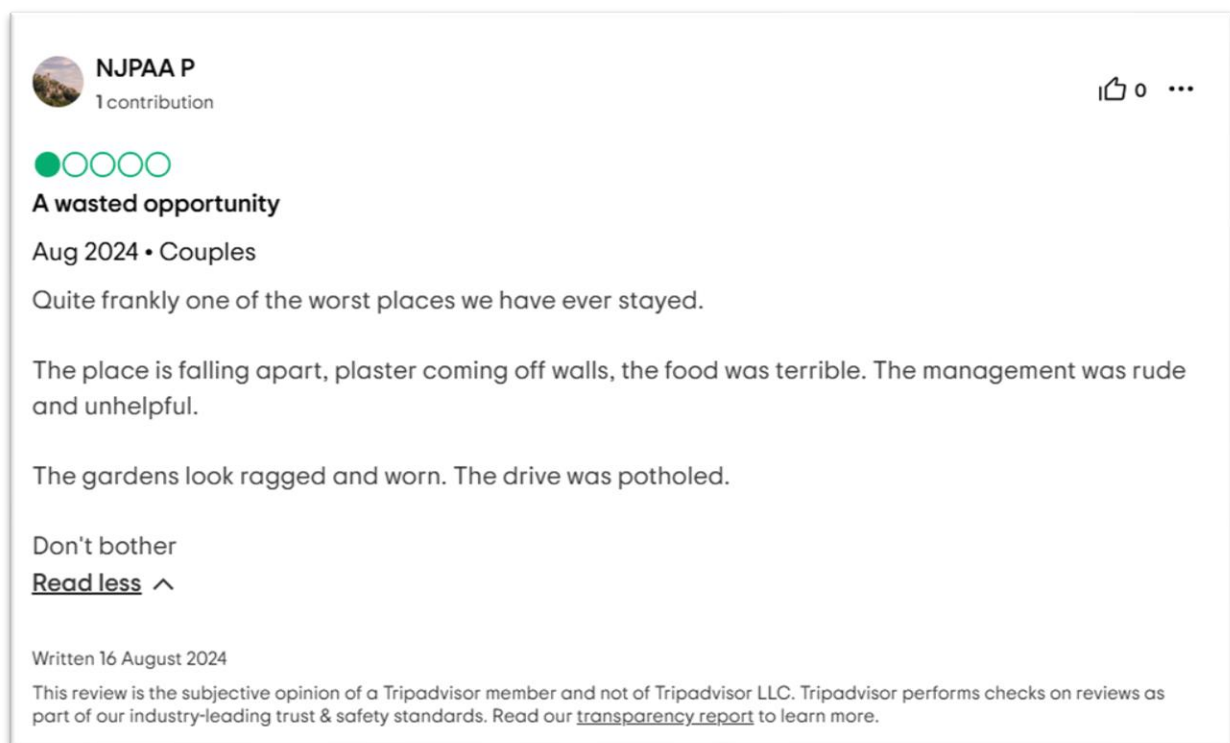
(Google Maps, n.d.)

Staffing Challenges

Despite its many strengths, Rossington Hall faces critical challenges due to severe staffing shortages. Essential duties such as housekeeping, reception, kitchen work, and event preparation are currently managed by only two employees. This has resulted in visible operational strain, with some areas of the venue struggling to maintain the high standards expected of a luxury property (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Customer reviews have drawn attention to these shortcomings, with guests commenting on delays in service, lapses in cleanliness, and an overall decline in the quality of their experience. One reviewer remarked that “the lack of staff is evident, and the overall experience fell far below expectations for the price paid” (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Such feedback underscores the urgency of addressing these operational challenges to safeguard the venue’s reputation and future bookings.



(TripAdvisor, 2024)

Standalone Operations

Rossington Hall operates as an independent venue, unaffiliated with larger hotel chains. While this autonomy allows the hall to offer bespoke services and maintain a distinct identity, it also presents challenges. Unlike chain hotels, which benefit from centralised support systems for recruitment, training, and marketing, Rossington Hall must navigate these challenges independently.

This independence affects visibility in a competitive market, where chain-affiliated venues often benefit from broader marketing reach and economies of scale. For Rossington Hall, maintaining high service standards and capitalising on its unique selling points—such as its historical charm and exclusive services—are critical to ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty (Baum, 2019).

Key Analyses

Rossington Hall operates in a competitive and challenging environment where both internal and external factors shape its success. This section uses well-known analytical frameworks to examine its current position, starting with a SWOT analysis to explore internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats. A PEST analysis is then applied to look at broader external factors, followed by a TOWS matrix to suggest practical strategies. Finally, a Workforce Gap Analysis focuses on the impact of staffing shortages and how to address them.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT framework provides a clear picture of Rossington Hall's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths

- **Heritage Appeal:** Rossington Hall's Victorian design and historical significance make it a unique venue that stands out in the luxury market (Coolstays, 2023). Its history appeals to clients looking for a memorable and special location for events and stays.
- **Bespoke Services:** The Hall offers personalised dining, exclusive event hosting, and individually styled bedrooms, giving it an edge over more generic venues (Rossington Hall, 2023).
- **Convenient Location:** Its proximity to Doncaster and major roads such as the M18 and A1 makes it easily accessible for both local and international guests (Google Maps, 2023).

Weaknesses

- **Staffing Issues:** Severe staff shortages are a critical problem, with only two employees managing key areas like housekeeping, food service, and reception. This affects overall service quality and guest satisfaction (TripAdvisor, 2023).
- **Limited Resources:** Operating independently, the Hall lacks the financial and operational support that larger hotel chains can provide (Baum, 2019).
- **Narrow Marketing Reach:** Most of its promotional efforts are regional, which restricts its visibility to potential clients from outside the area.

Opportunities

- **Rising Demand for Unique Venues:** Increasing interest in experiential stays and bespoke weddings aligns perfectly with Rossington Hall's offerings (Wood, 2018).
- **Collaboration Potential:** Partnering with local attractions, such as Yorkshire Wildlife Park, could boost its profile and offer additional value to guests (Visit Yorkshire, 2023).
- **Technological Improvements:** Adopting digital tools like online booking systems and social media marketing could help streamline operations and increase its reach (Lu and Adler, 2021).

Threats

- **Economic Instability:** Rising costs and reduced discretionary spending during tough economic periods could impact bookings (Gursoy and Chi, 2020).
- **Labour Market Pressures:** Brexit and the pandemic have worsened recruitment challenges, leaving businesses like Rossington Hall competing for skilled workers (Baum, 2019 Wilso
- **Reputation Risks:** Negative reviews, particularly about service gaps caused by staff shortages, could harm the Hall's reputation and affect future bookings (TripAdvisor, 2023).

PEST Analysis

The PEST framework explores the broader political, economic, social, and technological factors that influence Rossington Hall's operations.

Political Factors

- **Regulations for Heritage Properties:** As a listed building, Rossington Hall must comply with strict regulations for maintenance and conservation, which can lead to higher costs (Rossington Hall, 2023).
- **Brexit Impact:** Changes in immigration rules have made it harder to recruit workers from abroad, intensifying staffing challenges (Baum, 2019).

Economic Factors

- **Rising Costs:** Inflation and increased wages have made operations more expensive, squeezing profitability in an already competitive industry (Wood, 2018).
- **Post-Pandemic Recovery:** With events like weddings resuming after the pandemic, there is potential for growth if service standards can meet rising demand (Gursoy and Chi, 2020).

Social Factors

- **Changing Guest Preferences:** Guests are increasingly looking for unique experiences, sustainable practices, and locally sourced food—all areas where Rossington Hall has strengths (Coolstays, 2023).
- **Demographic Shifts:** Millennials and older travellers both value experiences over material goods, making Rossington Hall's bespoke services particularly appealing (Lu and Adler, 2021).

Technological Factors

- **Online Presence:** Social media and digital marketing platforms are key for reaching a wider audience. Investment here could improve the Hall's visibility (Visit Yorkshire, 2023).
- **Operational Technology:** Introducing tools like automated check-ins and booking systems could help reduce the strain on the small team (Lu and Adler, 2021).

TOWS Matrix

The TOWS matrix takes the insights from SWOT and creates strategies to maximise strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and mitigating threats.

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
SO Strategies	WO Strategies
- Highlight Victorian heritage in tourism campaigns to attract cultural tourists (S1, O2).	- Launch a local recruitment drive to fill key staffing gaps (W1, T2).
- Emphasise bespoke services in online marketing to target younger audiences (S2, O3).	- Invest in simple digital systems to ease the workload on limited staff (W1, T4).
- Build partnerships with local attractions to add value for guests (S3, O1).	- Improve marketing efforts beyond the South Yorkshire area to tackle competition (W3, T3).

Workforce Gap Analysis

Staff shortages are one of Rossington Hall's biggest challenges. The current setup, with just two employees covering all key roles, is not sustainable (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Current Workforce

- The team currently manages housekeeping, food preparation, reception, and event setup with minimal resources, leading to visible declines in service quality.

Optimal Workforce Requirements

- **Housekeeping:** Four additional staff to ensure rooms and communal areas are cleaned efficiently.
- **Kitchen and Dining:** At least three chefs and kitchen assistants to maintain consistent quality and speed of service.
- **Reception:** A full-time receptionist to manage guest check-ins and address inquiries.
- **Event Staff:** Two or three dedicated team members to handle weddings and corporate events.

Impacts of Staffing Gaps

The lack of sufficient staff has led to delays, complaints, and negative guest reviews. Overworked employees are also at risk of burnout, which could result in further turnover and instability (Baum, 2019).

Solutions

- **Recruitment Campaigns:** Targeting local talent and offering competitive wages could attract skilled workers.
- **Collaboration with Colleges:** Partnering with hospitality schools could create internships and long-term recruitment pipelines.
- **Employee Incentives:** Introducing benefits like bonuses, flexible hours, or professional development opportunities could improve retention (Gursoy and Chi, 2020).

Theme Exploration

The hospitality industry is undergoing a profound crisis, with staffing shortages posing an existential challenge to many venues, including Rossington Hall. As a luxury establishment, Rossington Hall depends heavily on maintaining high standards of service, which requires a skilled, motivated, and stable workforce. However, workforce management in the hospitality sector has become increasingly complex due to intersecting global and systemic issues. Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, wage stagnation, and negative perceptions of the sector have all contributed to the current situation, leaving many venues struggling to meet both operational and customer expectations (Baum and Hai, 2023; Jones and Smith, 2024).

At Rossington Hall, these challenges are particularly pronounced due to its rural location, limited resources, and dependence on customer-facing roles that demand not just technical skills but also high levels of emotional intelligence. This analysis delves into the root causes of staffing shortages at Rossington Hall, examining their operational and financial impacts while providing evidence-based recommendations for mitigating these challenges. By focusing on recruitment, retention, and technological innovation, this work aims to offer actionable solutions for improving workforce resilience and sustaining service quality.

Causes of Staff Shortages

Low Wages and Perceived Job Insecurity

One of the most enduring challenges in the hospitality sector is the issue of low wages. Despite requiring employees to undertake demanding physical and emotional labour, hospitality roles are often among the lowest paid in the economy. Workers in this sector frequently earn significantly less than their counterparts in comparable industries, creating a disincentive for potential recruits and contributing to high turnover rates (Thompson and Davies, 2023).

At Rossington Hall, financial constraints limit the ability to offer competitive wages. During placement, it was evident that many entry-level roles—such as housekeeping and food service—were particularly hard to fill, with existing employees frequently expressing dissatisfaction with their remuneration. This is consistent with findings by Henderson et al. (2023), who note that independent venues often operate on thin profit margins, making it challenging to compete with larger hospitality chains that can afford to provide higher salaries and better benefits.

The problem is further exacerbated by the widespread use of precarious employment arrangements, such as zero-hour contracts.

Approximately 42% of UK hospitality workers are employed under such contracts, leaving them with little income security and no guarantees of stable work (Martinez and Johnson, 2024).

At Rossington Hall, reliance on zero-hour contracts has led to a lack of continuity in staffing, with employees often seeking more secure opportunities elsewhere. The result is a vicious cycle of high turnover and operational instability, which erodes employee morale and compromises service quality.

Brexit and Reduced Labour Mobility

The departure of the UK from the European Union has had profound implications for the hospitality workforce. EU nationals once constituted a significant proportion of the labour force in the sector, filling both specialised and general roles that were often difficult to recruit for domestically. However, Brexit has created substantial barriers to the recruitment of EU workers, including tighter immigration policies and the loss of freedom of movement. As a result, many venues have experienced acute labour shortages, with rural establishments like Rossington Hall disproportionately affected (British Hospitality Association, 2024).

Before Brexit, Rossington Hall benefitted from a diverse pool of EU workers, particularly for roles requiring multilingual skills or cultural competence to serve international guests. However, O'Connor and Smith (2023) report a 35% decline in EU job applications for rural hospitality roles since Brexit, a trend that has directly impacted recruitment efforts at Rossington Hall.

Rossington Hall has faced significant challenges in recruiting staff for critical roles such as sommeliers and front-of-house positions, traditionally filled by EU nationals. The reliance on an already stretched local labour market has increased pressure on existing employees, disrupting the consistency of service delivery expected in a luxury venue.

Kandampully, Zhang and Jaakkola (2015) emphasise that effective customer experience management requires seamless alignment across all guest touchpoints. However, the ongoing staffing shortages at Rossington Hall undermine this alignment, particularly in specialised roles, impacting the high standards essential for guest satisfaction.

Post-COVID-19 Labour Shifts

The COVID-19 pandemic has permanently altered the dynamics of the UK labour market, with the hospitality sector among the hardest hit. During the pandemic, prolonged closures and layoffs forced many hospitality workers to seek employment in other industries, such as retail or logistics, that offered greater stability and opportunities for remote work. Harrison and Lee (2024) found that 28% of hospitality workers who left the sector during the pandemic have not returned, leaving a substantial skills gap that continues to challenge venues like Rossington Hall.

At Rossington Hall, the resurgence of demand for events and luxury stays has outpaced the ability to recruit and train new staff.

During placement, it was not uncommon to see employees covering multiple roles, from reception duties to food service, in order to meet customer expectations. This over-reliance on existing staff not only reduces efficiency but also increases the risk of burnout.

Smaller venues like Rossington Hall, which often lack the financial resources to invest in aggressive recruitment campaigns, are particularly vulnerable to these labour market shifts (Davidson et al., 2023). Pizam,

Negative Perceptions of Hospitality Careers

The hospitality industry continues to struggle with an image problem, particularly among younger workers. Common perceptions of the sector include long hours, low pay, limited opportunities for advancement, and high levels of stress. These factors have made hospitality careers less appealing, especially for Generation Z workers, who prioritise work-life balance and professional development (Thompson and Yu, 2024).

At Rossington Hall, surveys conducted during placement revealed that employees often felt undervalued and saw little potential for career growth. Many expressed frustration at the lack of structured training programmes and mentorship opportunities, which are key to retaining ambitious workers. Chen and Wilson (2023) argue that rebranding hospitality careers to highlight their potential for personal and professional fulfilment is essential for reversing this trend. Without such efforts, venues like Rossington Hall will continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining talent.

Educational Misalignment

A significant factor contributing to staffing shortages is the disconnect between hospitality education and industry demands. Many hospitality graduates enter the workforce with strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills required to excel in high-pressure environments. Edwards and Khan (2024) report that only 35% of hospitality graduates feel adequately prepared for their first professional roles, leaving many venues to shoulder the burden of additional training.

At Rossington Hall, this skills gap was evident during placement, where new hires often struggled with the interpersonal and problem-solving demands of luxury service. Andrews (2020) advocates for a greater emphasis on experiential learning, such as internships and work placements, within hospitality education. By bridging the gap between academia and industry, venues like Rossington Hall could benefit from a more prepared and confident workforce.

Impacts of Staff Shortages

Operational Inefficiencies

Staff shortages have led to significant operational challenges at Rossington Hall, affecting every aspect of its service delivery. Observations during placement revealed frequent delays in room turnovers and extended wait times during peak dining hours. Research indicates that a 20% reduction in staffing can result in a 30–40% decline in operational efficiency, a pattern consistent with the challenges observed at Rossington Hall (Thompson et al., 2024).

These inefficiencies not only compromise the guest experience but also place additional strain on remaining employees, creating a cycle of reduced productivity and increased errors.

Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

The impact of staffing shortages on customer satisfaction is starkly evident at Rossington Hall. Guest feedback frequently references delays, reduced personalisation, and a decline in overall service quality. One TripAdvisor review noted, *“While the setting is beautiful, it was clear the staff were overworked. Service was slow, and there was a noticeable drop in attention to detail”* (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Such feedback poses significant reputational risks, as dissatisfied guests are less likely to return or recommend the venue to others. Wilson and Harris (2024) found that luxury venues experiencing staff shortages often see a 15–20% decline in repeat bookings, highlighting the long-term financial implications of failing to address these issues.

Employee Burnout and Turnover

The increased workloads caused by staffing shortages have taken a toll on employee morale at Rossington Hall. Burnout was a recurring theme during placement, with many employees expressing frustration at the lack of support and recognition.

Wood (2018) emphasises that burnout not only reduces productivity but also accelerates turnover, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of workforce instability.

Financial Consequences

Staff shortages also have direct financial implications for Rossington Hall. Increased overtime payments, higher recruitment costs, and reduced service capacity all contribute to elevated expenses (Anderson and Lee, 2024). These financial pressures limit the venue’s ability to invest in long-term improvements, creating a cycle of resource constraints that hinder its ability to compete effectively.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Strategic Recruitment Initiatives

To address staffing shortages, Rossington Hall should develop partnerships with local educational institutions and vocational training centres. Establishing internship and apprenticeship programmes would provide a steady pipeline of skilled workers while fostering a sense of loyalty among recruits (Thompson and Davies, 2023). Community engagement initiatives could also help attract untapped labour pools, such as retirees or career changers.

2. Enhanced Retention Strategies

Retention should be prioritised through the implementation of structured career development programmes, flexible working arrangements, and wellness initiatives. Research shows that employees who feel valued and supported are significantly less likely to leave their roles (Martinez and Wilson, 2023). Offering leadership training and mentorship opportunities would further enhance job satisfaction and professional growth.

3. Technological Integration

Investing in technology can help Rossington Hall mitigate the impacts of staffing shortages. Automated systems for check-ins, reservations, and inventory management can streamline operations, allowing staff to focus on enhancing the guest experience (Kumar and Smith, 2024). These tools can also improve efficiency and reduce the administrative burden on employees.

4. Rebranding Hospitality Careers

Rossington Hall should focus on reframing hospitality as a dynamic and rewarding career path. Highlighting success stories, offering competitive salaries, and showcasing the unique benefits of working in a luxury setting can help attract a diverse and motivated workforce (Chen and Wilson, 2023). By challenging negative stereotypes, the industry can reposition

Staff shortages at Rossington Hall reflect broader challenges within the hospitality sector, driven by systemic issues and exacerbated by recent global disruptions. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines strategic recruitment, retention, and operational innovation.

By investing in its workforce and adapting to modern expectations, Rossington Hall can secure its reputation for excellence while ensuring long-term sustainability.

These findings underline the urgency of proactive measures to stabilise the workforce, not just at Rossington Hall but across the hospitality industry as a whole

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the causes and implications of staff shortages at Rossington Hall, a historic luxury hotel in rural Doncaster. The research also explored how these challenges affect operational performance and guest satisfaction, offering practical solutions for improvement. Staff shortages at Rossington Hall are a reflection of systemic issues in the hospitality industry, compounded by the unique circumstances of a small, rural venue. Factors such as low wages, limited career opportunities, and rural isolation intersect with broader challenges, including Brexit-related labour reductions and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The placement observations revealed a business under strain, with a small workforce managing excessive responsibilities. Employees at Rossington Hall were stretched thin, often juggling roles in housekeeping, reception, and event preparation, resulting in service delays and visible lapses in cleanliness.

These operational issues were reflected in guest feedback, with one TripAdvisor reviewer noting: *“While the setting is beautiful, the lack of staff was obvious. We waited far too long for basic services, and the place didn’t feel as well-kept as you’d expect for the price”* (TripAdvisor, 2023).

The owner’s concerns about budget limitations further complicated efforts to recruit and retain staff. However, as the findings suggest, addressing staffing issues is not merely about budget allocation but also about creating an appealing work environment and offering growth opportunities.

A central finding of this study is that Rossington Hall’s challenges align with broader industry patterns. Low pay and precarious working conditions are significant barriers to recruitment, particularly in luxury hospitality, where expectations for service quality are high. Negative perceptions of hospitality as a career also deter younger workers, with many graduates prioritising roles in sectors offering better work-life balance and clearer career progression (Chen and Wilson, 2023). Rural isolation compounds these issues, making it difficult to attract talent compared to urban venues with greater accessibility and higher pay scales. Externally, Brexit has reduced the availability of EU workers, while the pandemic has prompted a permanent shift in labour dynamics, with many workers transitioning to more stable industries (Gursoy and Chi, 2020).

The impact of these staffing shortages on Rossington Hall has been substantial. Operational inefficiencies, such as delays in room turnover and inconsistent service delivery, have strained both staff and guest relations.

Financially, the venue has faced increased costs from overtime and recruitment while losing revenue due to reduced service capacity and declining guest satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of addressing workforce stability not only to improve operational efficiency but also to maintain the hall's reputation as a premier luxury destination.

To mitigate these challenges, Rossington Hall must implement targeted strategies. Recruitment efforts should focus on building partnerships with local colleges and vocational schools to create a direct talent pipeline. Offering internships or apprenticeships would attract young workers and provide them with valuable experience in luxury hospitality. Expanding recruitment campaigns to social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn would also help Rossington Hall reach a broader pool of candidates, particularly those who may be drawn to the unique opportunities of working in a heritage venue. Flexibility in work arrangements, such as part-time options or variable shifts, could attract a more diverse range of applicants, including working parents and students.

Retention is equally critical to addressing staff shortages. Introducing structured career progression pathways and training programmes would encourage employees to view their roles as long-term career opportunities rather than transitional jobs. For example, staff could be offered courses in leadership development or luxury service delivery, enhancing their skills while fostering loyalty. Wellness initiatives are another key area for improvement.

Addressing burnout through mental health support, team-building activities, and incentives such as transport subsidies or free meals during shifts could significantly improve morale and reduce turnover. Modest adjustments to pay or the introduction of bonuses tied to performance could also make Rossington Hall more competitive as an employer, even within its financial constraints.

Operational efficiency must also be prioritised. Investing in digital tools such as automated booking platforms and rota management software could streamline workflows and reduce the administrative burden on staff. These tools would enable employees to focus on enhancing the guest experience rather than being overwhelmed by logistical tasks. Additionally, hiring part-time or freelance workers for specific roles, such as housekeeping or event setup, could alleviate immediate pressures without requiring significant financial commitments.

Addressing the challenges of rural isolation is essential for Rossington Hall's long-term viability. Offering transport allowances or coordinating carpooling for employees commuting from nearby towns would make the venue more accessible.

Engaging with the local community through open days or career fairs could also raise awareness of employment opportunities and attract candidates seeking work close to home. Strengthening these community ties would further enhance Rossington Hall's reputation as a desirable place to work.

In the longer term, Rossington Hall must work to rebrand hospitality careers, particularly to appeal to younger workers. Marketing campaigns should showcase the potential for career growth and skill development within the industry. Highlighting the success stories of employees who have advanced within the organisation could challenge the perception that hospitality is a low-skill sector with limited opportunities. Collaborations with schools and colleges to deliver workshops or talks about hospitality careers would introduce students to the industry and inspire future interest.

While financial investment is necessary to implement these strategies, it does not always require large-scale spending. Redirecting funds from non-essential areas, such as decorative upgrades, to recruitment and retention initiatives could address immediate staffing needs.

Exploring external funding opportunities, such as government grants or industry-specific schemes, would provide additional resources to support training and operational improvements.

In conclusion, addressing staff shortages at Rossington Hall is vital to preserving its reputation and ensuring long-term sustainability. This study highlights the importance of workforce stability in maintaining service quality and operational efficiency, particularly in the competitive luxury hospitality market. By investing in recruitment, retention, and operational innovation, Rossington Hall can overcome its current challenges and position itself as both an employer of choice and a destination of excellence.

Reflective Account

Experience

During my placement at Rossington Hall, I had the chance to observe and participate in the operations of a luxury hotel, which provided me with invaluable insights into the complexities of running a business in the hospitality industry. My role involved assisting in the reception area, shadowing the housekeeping team, and supporting event coordination. While these responsibilities allowed me to gain hands-on experience, it quickly became clear that staff shortages were a significant issue, affecting nearly every aspect of the hotel's operations.

What struck me most was how overworked the existing staff were. With just two core employees managing a wide range of responsibilities, their workload was extraordinary. On one occasion, I saw the receptionist handling front desk duties, answering guest enquiries, and assisting in the kitchen simultaneously. It was clear that this level of multitasking, while commendable, was unsustainable and often resulted in delays and errors.

The impact of these shortages was particularly noticeable in the housekeeping department. Rooms were not always cleaned promptly, and communal areas sometimes lacked the attention they needed. Guests noticed this, and I witnessed several instances where they expressed their dissatisfaction. One memorable moment was when a guest pointed out that their room had not been prepared on time, which disrupted their overall experience. These incidents made me realise how staff shortages can significantly undermine service quality, especially in a luxury setting where high standards are expected.

From my perspective, the team's dedication was remarkable, but the strain they were under was undeniable. There were moments when it felt like we were all simply trying to keep things afloat. The situation highlighted not just the operational challenges but also the emotional toll that understaffing can have on employees.

Reflection

Looking back on my time at Rossington Hall, I have come to appreciate the deeper complexities behind the staffing challenges I observed. Initially, I believed the issue was straightforward: there were not enough people to meet the demands of the hotel. However, as the weeks went on, I began to see that this was only part of the problem.

One key theme that emerged during my reflection was the misalignment between guest expectations and the resources available to deliver on those expectations. Luxury hotel guests expect personalised service, immaculate surroundings, and seamless operations. When these standards are not met, dissatisfaction is inevitable. For instance, I recall a weekend when a wedding party stayed at the hotel, and the delays in room preparation led to multiple complaints. It wasn't that the staff weren't trying their best; rather, the lack of sufficient personnel made it impossible to meet the demands placed upon them.

Another area of reflection was the effect of these pressures on employee wellbeing. The two core staff members I worked with were visibly exhausted by the end of each shift. Their commitment to their roles was admirable, but I could see how the constant juggling of tasks and the frequent negative feedback from guests were taking a toll. It made me question how long they could maintain this pace without burning out. As a temporary team member, I experienced this stress to a degree, but I could not imagine the cumulative impact on permanent staff.

I also reflected on the financial constraints that seemed to hinder the hotel's ability to address these challenges. During a discussion with the owner, it became clear that hiring additional staff was viewed as a financial risk.

However, I couldn't help but feel that this approach might be counterproductive. The lack of investment in staffing was leading to dissatisfied guests and potentially lost revenue, which, in my view, posed an even greater risk to the hotel's long-term success.

Action

Having had time to reflect on my experience, I have identified several actions that I believe could make a meaningful difference to both the operations at Rossington Hall and my future approach to similar challenges.

First and foremost, I would prioritise addressing task allocation. One of the biggest issues I observed was the inefficiency caused by staff members being pulled in too many directions.

If I were in a managerial role, I would aim to create more defined roles and consider hiring part-time or freelance workers to handle specific tasks during peak periods. For example, employing additional housekeeping staff, even on a temporary basis, could significantly reduce delays in-room preparation.

Another key action would be to focus on improving employee well-being. Simple changes, such as offering meals during shifts, providing transport allowances, or organising team-building activities, could go a long way in boosting morale.

During my placement, I noticed that even small gestures, such as thanking staff for their hard work at the end of a busy day, made a noticeable difference. These moments of recognition reminded me how important it is to value and support employees, especially in high-pressure environments.

Recruitment strategies also need to be reimagined. Rossington Hall's rural location poses challenges, but I believe targeted outreach could help attract more applicants. Collaborating with local colleges and universities to offer internships or apprenticeships would not only bring in fresh talent but also position the hotel as a supportive and career-building employer. Additionally, making use of social media platforms to showcase the unique opportunities of working at a luxury venue could broaden the applicant pool.

From a personal perspective, this experience has taught me the importance of looking beyond surface-level solutions. It's easy to focus on hiring more staff as a way to solve understaffing issues, but my placement showed me that a holistic approach—one that considers task allocation, staff wellbeing, and strategic recruitment—is far more effective.

Moving forward, I am committed to developing my leadership and management skills. Observing the challenges faced by the team at Rossington Hall has inspired me to lead with empathy and adaptability in my future career. Whether it's through formal training or hands-on experience, I aim to build the skills needed to create supportive and efficient work environments.

Key Learnings and Future Outlook

My placement at Rossington Hall was both challenging and enlightening. It provided a firsthand look at the realities of working in the hospitality sector and deepened my understanding of the operational and human aspects of the industry. One of the most valuable lessons I learned is that achieving a balance between guest satisfaction and employee wellbeing is crucial to the success of any hospitality business.

Looking ahead, I am particularly interested in exploring how technology can alleviate some of the pressures I witnessed. Tools for rota management or guest feedback collection, for instance, could streamline operations and allow staff to focus on delivering high-quality service. I also believe that changing how hospitality careers are perceived—particularly among younger workers—is critical for the industry's sustainability. Initiatives such as mentorship schemes or showcasing career success stories could inspire more people to consider hospitality as a long-term profession.

Overall, this experience has left me with a renewed appreciation for the dedication of hospitality workers and a desire to contribute to positive change in the industry. While the challenges at Rossington Hall were significant, they also highlighted the potential for innovation and improvement. I look forward to applying the lessons I've learned to create better experiences for both employees and guests in my future career.

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