

Appendix three: Outcomes of focus group meetings

Two focus groups were held with former students of Nottingham Trent University during October and November 2000. One group comprised 10 graduates of the BA (Hons) International Hospitality Management and the BA (Hons) Hotel and Catering Management programme who had not entered the hospitality industry, and 10 from the same courses who were currently working in the industry. The aim was to explore the factors influential in their decisions to leave or stay.

As perhaps might be expected, the reasons why people had left the industry varied between a set of *'push and pull'* factors. The majority of those who decided not to follow a career in the industry after one to three years of graduating had had poor experiences on their industrial placements, or after their first job in the industry. Several group members mentioned poor development opportunities. Interestingly, most of these people were not complaining about the practical work aspects on placement or in their first jobs. Their chief complaint was often about the absence of structured development plans, and the use of graduates as a stop-gap in some operations. In at least one case a graduate had joined a company that then went through a restructuring process and his job ceased to exist.

In one case, a student had demonstrated a long-term commitment to the industry, and had worked in hospitality retail operations in her year out. She then returned to the UK, enrolled on the course and was a keen student. She went to a hospitality venue where she was well respected and settled. Unfortunately, she had a minor accident and had to leave the placement. Again by luck, a placement at Marks and Spencer's came up at an unusual time and she got it. The consequence was in the long-run she was offered a place on its graduation training scheme and fast tracked to a management post – starting salary £18,000. In fact all of the people who had left the hospitality industry were working in other service industries, retailing or financial services in the main. The group who had been graduates for one to three years were on salaries ranging from £20,000 to £30,000.

Interestingly, the salaries of the other group representing those who had stayed in the hospitality industry were generally lower, ranging from about £12,000 to £24,000. Those who had entered the hotel sector tended to be paid lower salaries in the early stages of their jobs. In one case a graduate reported being offered just £4,500 as her first salary. Several of the group had worked in the welfare sector, particularly university jobs, and were reasonably paid and trained in their early jobs. One had worked in the local university for three years and had then opened her own restaurant with a partner in the Lake District. The impression was that the branded licensed retail and the restaurant sectors offered good pay and quick promotions for bright hard working students.

The key impression from the discussions about the attractions of the job was that graduates did not mind hard and demanding work, but looked for a reward package that recognised their contribution, and appraisal schemes that helped them to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses.

Not all these graduates had had good placement experiences. Two complained about placements where there had been little development and they had been stuck in largely operational posts for their year out. In both cases, they had not been put off by the experiences. Both had worked in the industry before enrolling on the course. The impression from these discussions were that the expectations of the student/graduate

were key in determining how they reacted to unprofessional management within the industry.

Overall, the graduates who remained seemed either to have '*life-style*' reasons for continuing to work in the industry, or had good experiences in their placements and early experiences in the industry. The graduates who left were either turned off by unprofessional management, or were tempted by pay and working conditions that exceeded their current reward package. Even those who no longer worked in the industry felt their courses had developed skills that they were currently using in the new sector.