WELL GROUNDED

# A STATE OF THE COFFEE NATION REPORT

2024

# AN EXPLORATION OF CAREER PROGRESSION IN SPECIALTY COFFEE

There is something for everyone. I wish people would see that....A lot of people I know who have left the industry have left because they see no career development in coffee, which is a shame because there is something for someone." Asian, Female, Account Manager

"Coffee is just so complex, and it's like a rabbit hole that you could kind of fall down forever, and this is the rabbit hole I would like to fall down."

Mixed/multiple, Non-binary, Barista

# FOREWORD
## EVE WAGG, CEO AND FOUNDER
## WELL GROUNDED

"Last year we undertook some internal research and identified that just over 40% of our Graduates were planning to leave the industry within 1 year citing pay and a lack of progression as the primary reasons. This highlighted our concern that coffee industry professionals were struggling to find a viable career path in the industry, an industry we all know and love. Thanks to the kind support of Trust for London, Well Grounded launched a research project to identify the barriers and opportunities for progression across the specialty coffee industry. This research aims to understand why people seem to leave the industry after a short period of time and what we can collectively do to empower a new generation of talent.

At Well Grounded we believe in the central importance of progression, development and diversity. 68% of our trainees are minority ethnic and over 2/3rds have an identified learning or mental health need. So much research has shown us that Brexit, the pandemic and the rising costs of living has resulted in a skills shortage and that retention is a key focus for all hospitality industry businesses. So how can we support our people to grow?

This research starts to paint a picture of what the current state of the coffee nation is. 68% of coffee professionals left the industry within two years of joining, with their primary reasons being pay, lack of a clear career path and progression opportunities. Within our focus groups a key finding highlighted that more diverse senior leadership representation needs to be addressed in order to empower diverse talent within the industry.

# 68%
### left the industry within 2 years

# 70%
### of individuals wanted to progress in coffee

That leads us to a crossroad - do we empower the great people we have and identify how we can support them and their peers to grow or do we continue to battle with the current labour shortages?

The good news is that every employer interviewed identifies that there is a need, and are looking for new ways to invest in their people. This paper explores a range of initiatives to help this growth with the most popular being technical skills, networking and critically mentoring.

Some solutions we have implemented here at Well Grounded include our recently launched Coffee Careers Accelerator programme, free to the individual. This includes speciality coffee association qualifications, mentoring, business skills, personal coaching and networking. All with the central aim of empowering the next generation of leadership in coffee.

**Imagine a world where 68% of industry professionals don't leave within 2 years but continue to flourish and shine, empowering a society where people are thriving socially and economically in a diverse, dynamic and nurturing coffee community."**

# FOREWORD
## LORRAINE COPES, CEO
## BEINCLUSIVE HOSPITALITY
## BECCI NEWTON, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY,
## INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYMENT STUDIES

"This ground-breaking report represents the first step toward gaining a better understanding of how the speciality coffee industry can evolve and promote greater diversity and inclusion across all career levels.

The industry holds a uniquely advantageous position, attracting coffee enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds. However, it's essential to recognise that simply attracting talent without carefully considering the factors affecting staff retention could lead to resources being continually allocated to recruitment efforts rather than fostering a thriving industry.

A significant percentage of survey respondents express a strong desire to advance their careers within the industry. Likewise, employers acknowledge the need for post-COVID changes in the industry landscape, presenting an opportunity for transformation.

While this report may be perceived as sobering, it offers both qualitative and quantitative insights intended to serve as a catalyst for change. It aims to provide comprehensive support for aspiring talent entering the industry, empowering them to pursue and achieve their ambitions." Lorraine Copes

"This report offers hugely valuable insights into the operation of the industry for its current and future workforce. It provides the intelligence to take action both as employers and wider research community.

At its best, the industry attracts people with a passion for coffee and can offer a range of job facets that they value from location, flexible working, a sense of community, and training and development. But this isn't systematically available across the industry and job roles, and people can feel stuck in their careers. While not everyone sees the industry as their future career, many do, but are not seeing progress.

Individuals feel there are obstacles — and many see intersectional barriers stemming from their age, gender and ethnicity. They want to see greater diversity across the industry and view better representation at senior levels as key to changes.

Job quality is lower in entry level roles, and employers do not necessarily harness the passion their workforce has to progress — yet if they did, it would help them address the staffing challenges they face.

Employers and individuals want better pathways and that requires building knowledge of advancement routes and putting in place the programmes that will genuinely build skills, capability and a culture of workforce integration. We also need to be confident in challenging employers to do better and equipping them with the programmes to support this." Becci Newton

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# 1. KEY FINDINGS

## 01

A love of coffee:
a key motivator for individuals joining the industry is a passion for coffee. The industry appeals to individuals who value local work, a work/life balance and flexibility around other commitments, and a community feel that coffee fosters. Our respondents felt that coffee is an industry that provides easier access with people feeling confident they have the skills required. Training and progression opportunities appear lower on the list, suggesting there is work to be done by the industry to actively promote the coffee industry as a fulfilling, viable long-term career.

## 02

Early leavers:
68% of industry leavers had less than two years tenure. Job satisfaction and retention rates improve for those in managerial and central support roles, suggesting that advancement in the industry results in better organisational commitment and a desire to continue their progression in coffee.

## 03

Barriers:
individuals identify the top barriers to progression as pay, lack of structured career paths, skills and training, and an unclear understanding of career opportunities. A lack of diversity in senior leadership is highlighted as a barrier by individuals and employers say it is something that needs to be addressed.

## 04

Employer picture:
employers identify four main challenges to recruitment and retention: smaller talent pool post-COVID and Brexit, monetary constraints in a tight profit margin industry, lack of representation, particularly at senior levels and undefined career pathways. Strategies from employers we spoke to include employee perks and benefits, flexibility, on-site training, ambitious internal promotions target and the recruitment of talent such as a Head of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

## 05

Progression:
70% of individuals would like to develop their career within the coffee industry and value diverse elements in a career development programme. Technical skills, mentoring, Speciality Coffee Association (SCA) qualifications and networking were most popular. A programme that includes accreditation is also important for most individuals.

## 06

Development:
for employers, a career development programme is viewed as a vital tool to support recruitment and retention. They can see the benefit for the individuals and business performance and strongly support the idea. Individuals may feel more valued due to investment in their progression, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and a positive relationship with their employer.

# 2. BACKGROUND

## 2.1 Project Vision

In April 2022, Well Grounded launched a research project built on the belief that a UK speciality coffee industry, prepared for and embracing diversity, with structured career and salary pathways, would result in employees that thrive and an industry that can retain and benefit from diverse talent.

Well Grounded wanted this to be a collaborative project and ensure they better understood the current coffee careers landscape and existing needs. To achieve this, Well Grounded:

Assembled a Steering Committee comprising of industry employers ranging in size, research organisations, diversity and inclusion experts and industry employees.

Worked with their Graduate and Employer Advisory Boards to gather insight and feedback.

Commissioned a diversity research organisation to undertake desk-based research, which explored the wider hospitality industry and found a lack of coffee-specific academic research to draw from.

Commissioned a researcher to explore the specific barriers to progression across the specialty coffee industry.

The overarching aim of the research was to identify barriers to progression and seek out best practice and solutions for progress.

## 2.2 Secondary Research Summary

Firstly, secondary research was undertaken to identify any existing research that could be utilised as part of the project. Data was gathered from 65 sources including articles, journals, magazines, eBooks, newspapers, podcasts as well as PGCC Only i.e. subscription-based database, available to enrolled students, faculty, administrators, and staff. The findings hypothesised that career progression and diversity are positively associated with occupational and organisational commitment, leading to greater staff retention.

The key findings from the research identified:

Evidence of the impact of career progression and diversity on business and individuals outcomes in the hospitality industry and a significant correlation between gender, educational, and racial diversity on organisational performance and workforce retention.

Evidence of a significant lack of diversity among employees, especially at senior leadership levels, impacts employees' confidence to advance their careers. Some challenges and barriers for those working in coffee include:

- An unclear career path and opportunities for progression
- Lack of structured training
- Poor compensation structures

Other broader organisational factors, such as generational differences and the size of the business, could significantly impact employee progression and workforce retention.

A literature review is an appraisal of secondary data. Therefore, a need for primary research was identified to create a more robust context that is closely aligned with the overarching mission of the project to deliver identified solutions and recommendations for the specialty coffee industry.

## 2.3 Primary Research Aims

The key aims for the primary research were as follows:

Understand what motivated people to join the coffee industry

Understand what barriers people experience to progressing in the coffee industry

Understand what reason(s) would make people leave the coffee industry

Understand what they need to stay and progress in the coffee industry

Identify gaps in training and skills in the coffee industry and any best practice

# 3. METHODOLOGY

We took a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach to the primary research.*
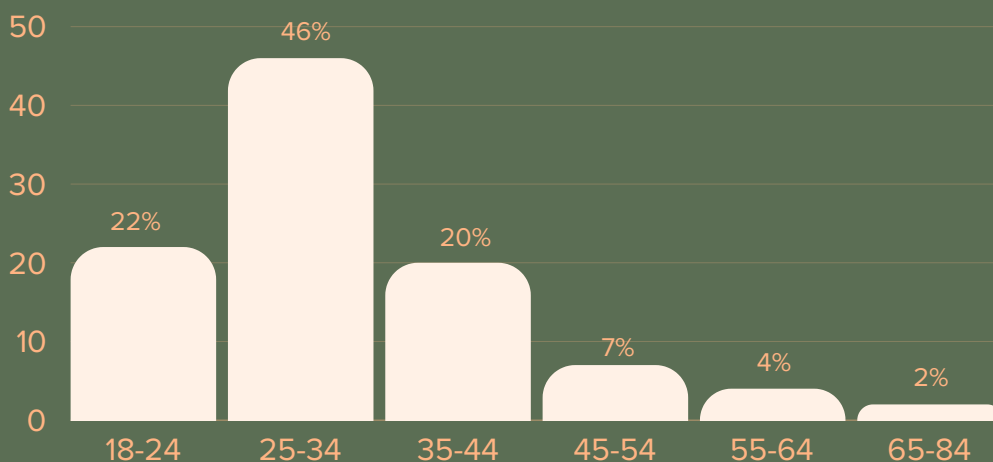
## 3.1 Survey

A Coffee Careers Survey of closed questions was created using SurveyMonkey to gather quantitative data. The invitation to take part was shared via Prolific.co, Well Grounded's social platforms and with Well Grounded stakeholders, supporters, and associated networks within the coffee industry.
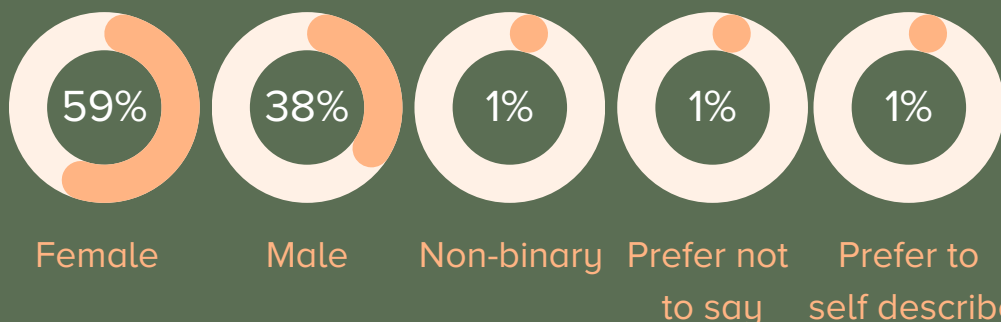
## 399

### Took part in the survey

Demographic statistic details are displayed here.

**AGE**

| | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-84 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % | 22% | 46% | 20% | 7% | 4% | 2% |

**GENDER IDENTIFY**

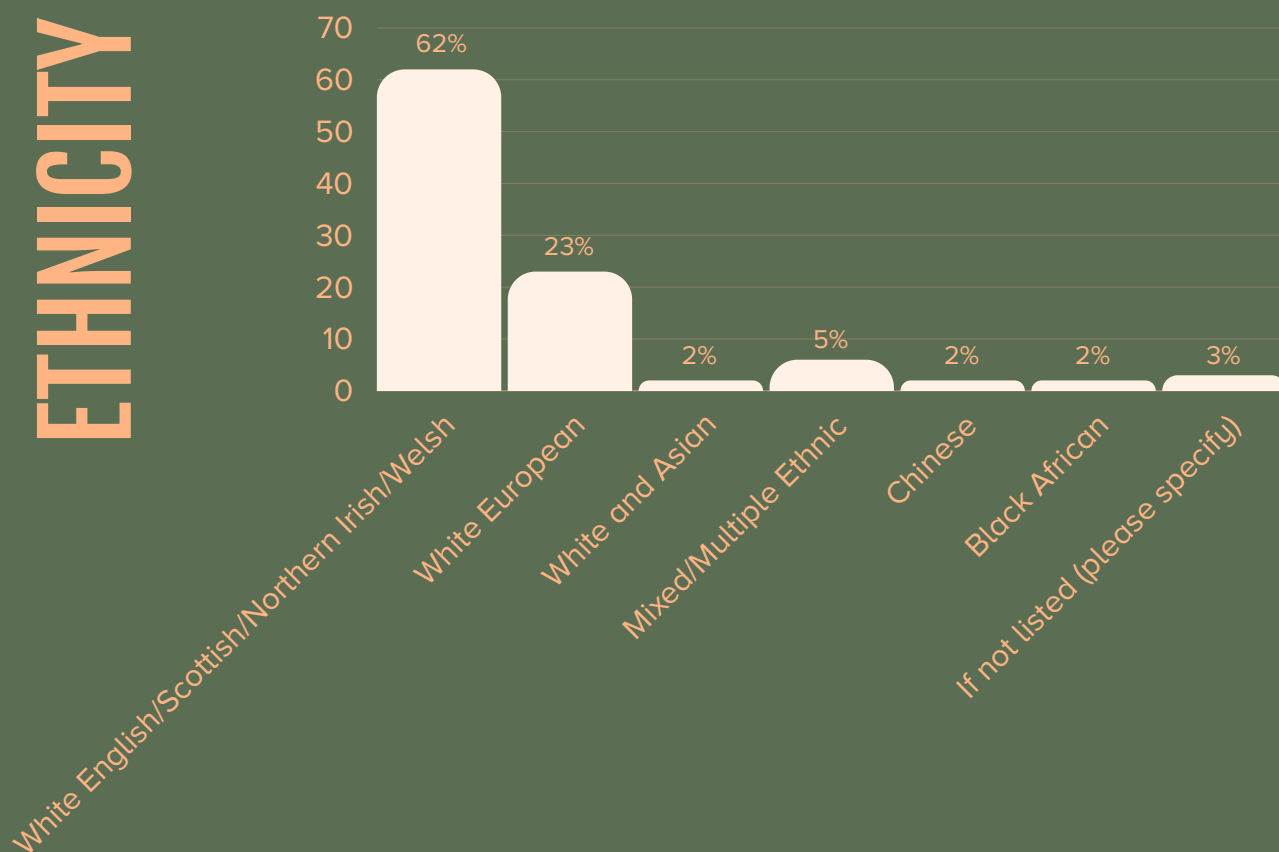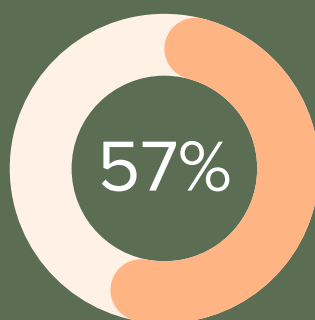| Female | Male | Non-binary | Prefer not to say | Prefer to self describe |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59% | 38% | 1% | 1% | 1% |

*Please note that the findings in this report represent the views of those who participated in the research and cannot be taken as a representation of all individuals and employers in the coffee industry.

# ETHNICITY

70
62%
60
50
40
30
23%
20
10
2%
5%
2%
2%
3%
0

White English/Scottish/Northern Irish/Welsh
White European
White and Asian
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic
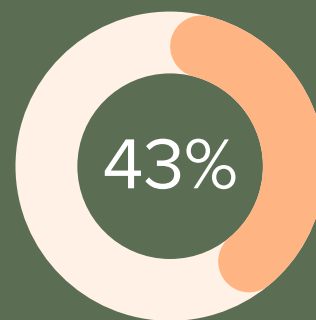Chinese
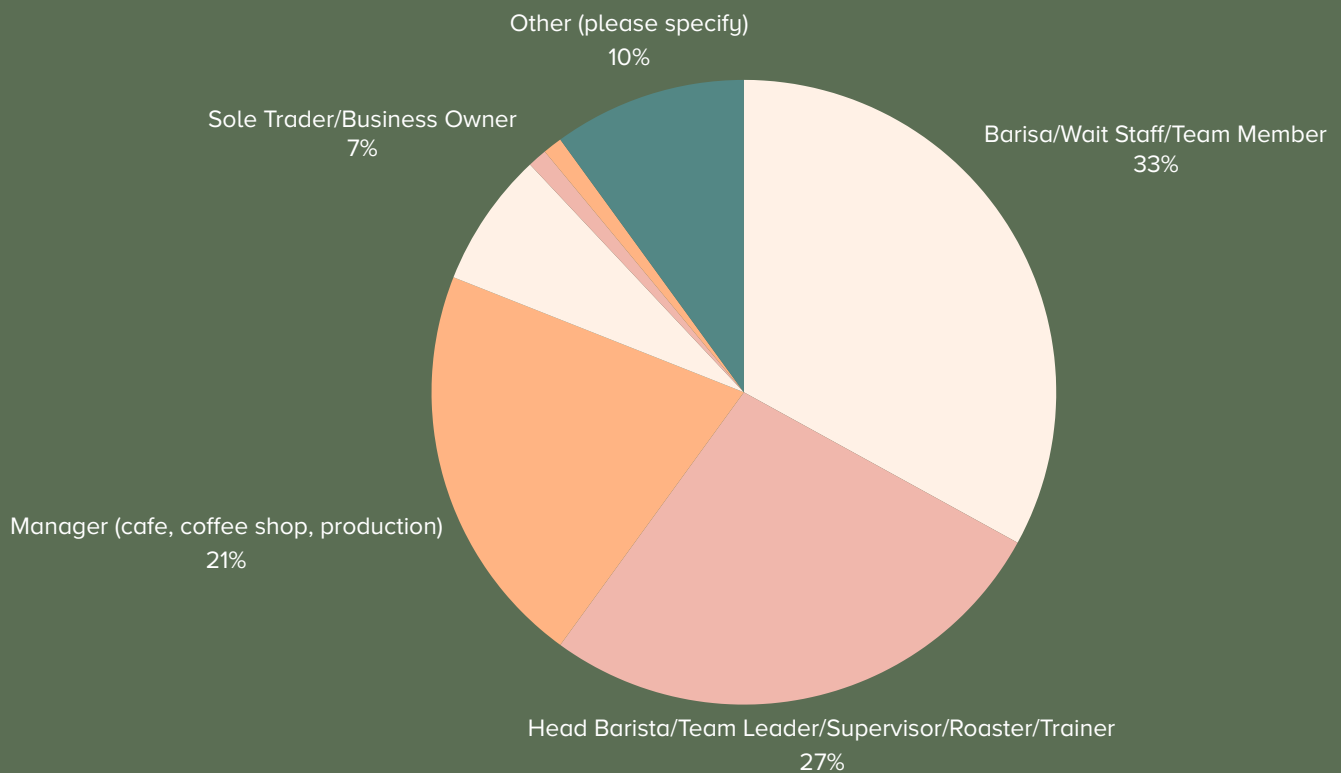Black African
If not listed (please specify)

# CURRENT WORK STATUS

57%

Working in the coffee industry

43%

No longer working in the coffee industry

# Which best describes your current role?

Other (please specify)
10%

Sole Trader/Business Owner
7%

Barisa/Wait Staff/Team Member
33%

Manager (cafe, coffee shop, production)
21%

Head Barista/Team Leader/Supervisor/Roaster/Trainer
27%

We recognise that the survey sample is limited and further research is needed to achieve a better representation of the industry. Recommendations are made at the end of the report on how we can achieve this.

## 3.2 Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interviews aimed to provide a better understanding of the experiences of a diverse workforce. We purposefully sampled to include a broad range of diversity characteristics utilising the Well Grounded network. We undertook 18 in-depth interviews with individuals to understand the perspectives of being an employee and an employer in the coffee industry. Each interview was an hour long, and detailed notes were drawn up on the basis of recordings. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were offered. We have not reported any intersections as the sample size is too small, so we report the sample as a whole throughout the report.

## a) Employers

The nine employer participants work in mid-level, senior managerial positions or are business owners. We spoke to a range of businesses, as seen below. Each interview was around 20 minutes long and detailed notes were drawn up on the basis of recordings. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were offered.

| Category | Number interviewed |
|---|---|
| Micro business (0 – 10 employees) | 1 |
| Small business (11 – 50 employees) | 2 |
| Medium business (51 – 249 employees) | 3 |
| Large business (250 – 999 employees) | 1 |
| Macro business (1,000+ employees) | 2 |

## b) Individual Profiles

Our qualitative interviews aimed to provide a better understanding of the experiences of a diverse workforce. We purposefully sampled to include a broad range of diversity characteristics utilising the Well Grounded network and spoke in-depth to 9 participants. This sampling ranged across:

- Length of service: ranging from less than one year to over seven years. Two no longer work in the coffee industry.
- Roles: ranging from barista, head barista, operations assistant and account manager.
- Age: ranging from 18 – 54.
- Gender: Four participants identified as female, four as male and one as non-binary.
- Ethnicity: we spoke to individuals from Chinese, Mixed/Multiple Ethnic, White and Black African, White European and White English/Scottish/Northern Irish/Welsh backgrounds. We have grouped the ethnic backgrounds of the nine individuals according to how they identify.

For ease of reference and reporting, we have categorised some job roles into levels and, where necessary, will refer to them as follows:

| Job role | Level |
| --- | --- |
| Barista, team member, wait staff | Entry level |
| Head barista, supervisor, team leader, roaster, trainer | Above-entry level |
| Manager | Manager-level |

Throughout this report, we have referenced verbatim views and experiences of the eighteen individuals we interviewed, protecting anonymity. We took this approach to allow participants to speak freely and ensure a richer set of data to add depth and context to the survey data.

## 3.3 A note on work attribute typology

When designing the primary research the researcher and steering committee identified 5 key work attributes that factor into an individual's happiness and satisfaction in work. These attributes are based on existing research.

- Work conditions: flexible, fits around other commitments and is well located
- Social and inclusive: an inclusive and welcoming working environment which is sociable
- Training and development: work offers progression and training and development
- Pay: reward in terms of financial and meaningful
- Interest: passion for coffee

These themes were used to design the surveys and interview questions and helped provide a structure to the research methodology.

1. Sutherland, John. "Job attribute preferences: who prefers what?." Employee Relations 34.2 (2011): 193-221; Warr, P. and Inceoglu, I. (2018) Work orientations, well-being and job content of self employed and employed professionals. Work, Employment and Society, 32 (2). pp. 292- 311. ISSN 0950-0170

# 4. MOTIVATORS: WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN THE COFFEE INDUSTRY?

This section aims to understand what motivates people to join the coffee industry.

## Key points:

- Passion for coffee is a primary motivator, followed by working locally and having the confidence in their skills to do the job.
- Social aspects and work-life balance are also key motivators. The communal atmosphere of coffee is a driver.
- Career growth is not a key motivator. Lower emphasis on the opportunities for training and career progression could indicate a lack of awareness or misconceptions about career potential in the industry. Both employers and employees agree on this point suggesting a need for the industry to more actively promote potential career pathways, growth and training opportunities.
- Job satisfaction and retention in the industry are inter-related. Those that are in above entry roles, with longer tenures are more happy and satisfied at work. This is supported by employer interviews.
- Retention rates improve significantly for those in above entry level positions suggesting that job satisfaction increases with advancement in the industry.
- These insights point to the need for promoting the potential for growth and advancement to keep employees motivated and satisfied in the early stages of their careers in this industry.
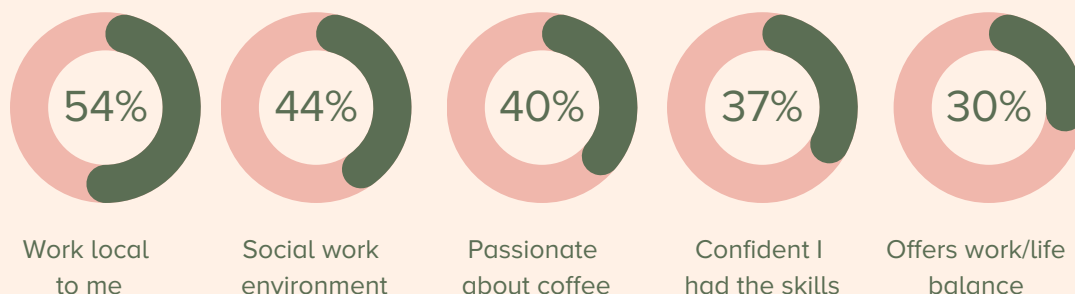
> "We have good solid retention at management levels."
>
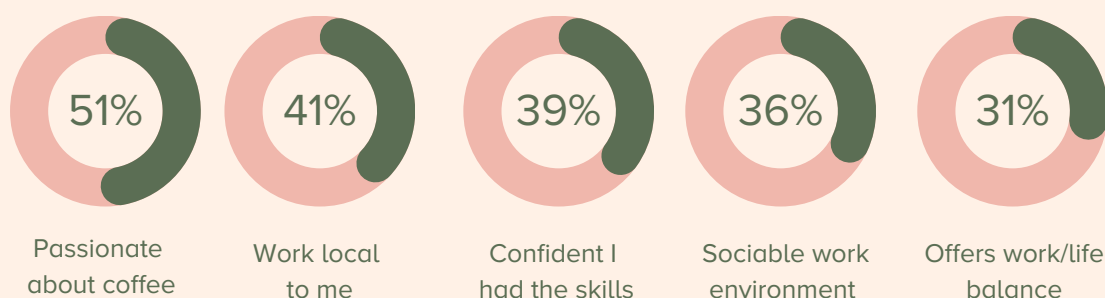> Director Of Operations, Small-sized employer

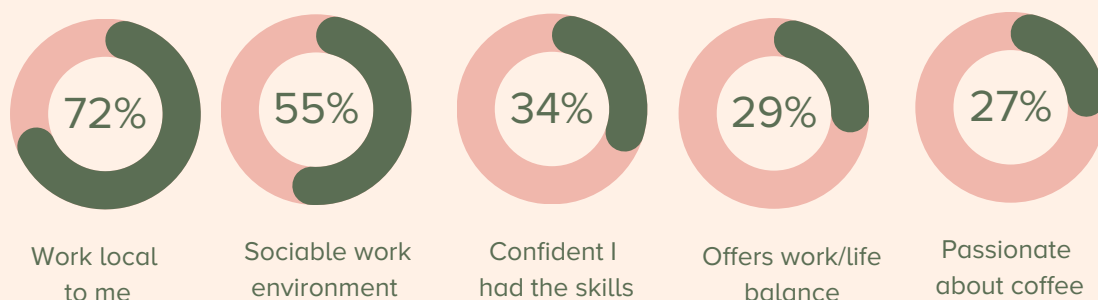## Ranking of reasons for joining for all survey respondants

**TOP REASONS FOR JOINING**

| 54% | 44% | 40% | 37% | 30% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work local to me | Social work environment | Passionate about coffee | Confident I had the skills | Offers work/life balance |

## Ranking of reasons for joining for those still in the industry

**TOP REASONS FOR JOINING**

| 51% | 41% | 39% | 36% | 31% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Passionate about coffee | Work local to me | Confident I had the skills | Sociable work environment | Offers work/life balance |

## Ranking of reasons for joining for those who have left the industry

**TOP REASONS FOR JOINING**

| 72% | 55% | 34% | 29% | 27% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work local to me | Sociable work environment | Confident I had the skills | Offers work/life balance | Passionate about coffee |

## 4.1 Motivators

# 51%
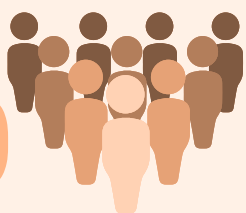
Currently working in the coffee industry joined due to a passion for coffee

- ✓ Valued working locally
- ✓ Industry was easy to access
- ✓ 1/3 felt they had skills required
- ✓ Sociable work environment
- ✓ Work/life balance

From those we spoke to qualitatively, the sense of a coffee community and the importance of this came through strongly.

18% selected opportunities for training and progression as a reason to join. It is lower on the list for coffee workers past and present. However, it resonates with employers' and individuals' qualitative responses indicating that the industry needs help:

1. Dispelling myths and
2. Building awareness of career pathways and development opportunities

Many of the interviewees mentioned how coffee is seen as an easy-entry job and something to have alongside other careers or passions.

"I still don't think the coffee industry is seen as a viable career option."
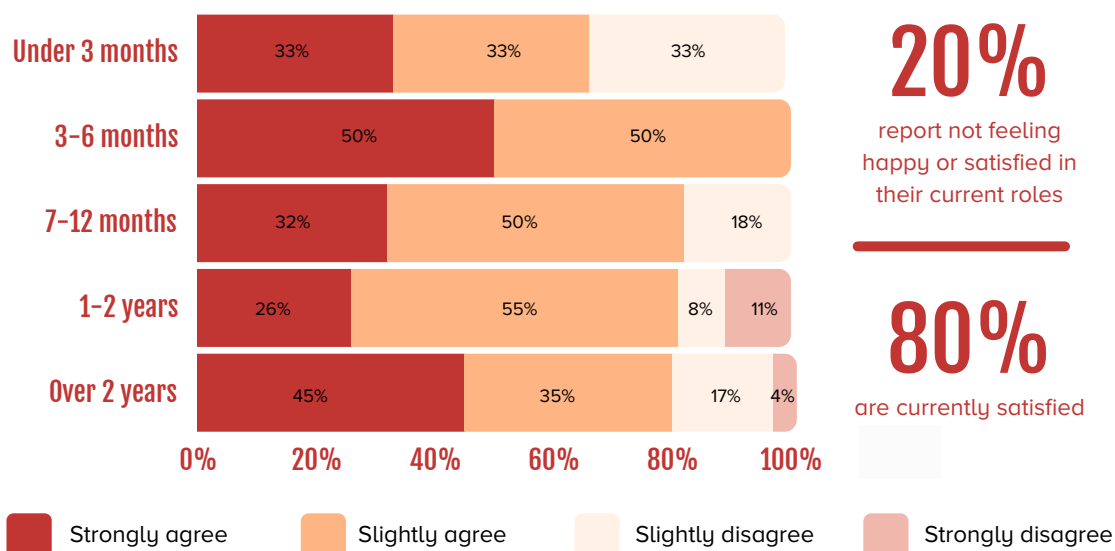
Owner, Small-sized employer

"There is something for everyone. I wish people would see that because a lot of people I know who have left the industry have left because they see no career development in coffee, which is a shame because there is something for someone."

Asian, Female, Account Manager

## 4.2 Satisfaction

This section of the data analysis aimed to better understand how happy people are in their current roles and the relationship with length of service and overall satisfaction at work. It also aimed to identify how long people stay in the industry.

### I FEEL HAPPY AND SATISFIED IN MY CURRENT ROLE

| Tenure | Strongly agree | Slightly agree | Slightly disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Under 3 months | 33% | 33% | 33% | |
| 3-6 months | 50% | 50% | | |
| 7-12 months | 32% | 50% | 18% | |
| 1-2 years | 26% | 55% | 8% | 11% |
| Over 2 years | 45% | 35% | 17% | 4% |

**20%** report not feeling happy or satisfied in their current roles

**80%** are currently satisfied

Legend: Strongly agree | Slightly agree | Slightly disagree | Strongly disagree

Overall, the data here is mixed and sample sizing could provide an insight into why. When we segmented the data further and identified the relationship to job titles the data told an interesting story.

68% of those surveyed who no longer work in coffee spent less than two years in the industry.

85% of those still in the industry have worked in coffee for over a year, and 33% are working in entry-level roles (barista / wait staff/team member).

78% of those surveyed with over two years tenure in coffee report working in above entry-level roles.

The data shows that those with more than two years of service working in above-entry-level roles in the coffee industry have higher levels of happiness and satisfaction in their roles.

This data suggests that advancing beyond entry-level positions might contribute to employee satisfaction and overall happiness at work.

This aligns with some employers we spoke to who commented on the higher retention rate of manager-level and central-support department roles and a bigger churn at the entry level.

*"We have a staff of over 80 people in the production and corporate teams, but our retention there is very strong, so those jobs don't come up that frequently."*
**CEO, Medium-sized employer**

# 5. KEY BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION

This section identifies current barriers to progression across different industry professionals.

Key Points:

85% of individuals in permanent employment show a stronger desire to progress in their careers and 78% of them have been in the industry for 2+ years.

Those who are in above-entry level roles express a higher satisfaction level in their current role. There is some indication that they are likely to have had some career progression already and can see the viability of a longer term coffee career.

Offering individuals permanent and secure employment retains them and also heightens their appetite to stay and progress and improves job quality.

Pay and benefits are the primary barriers to progression, followed by a lack of structured career development, training and skills.

A lack of representation in senior leadership in terms of gender, ethnicity and age have been identified as key barriers to progress which was highlighted in the secondary research also.
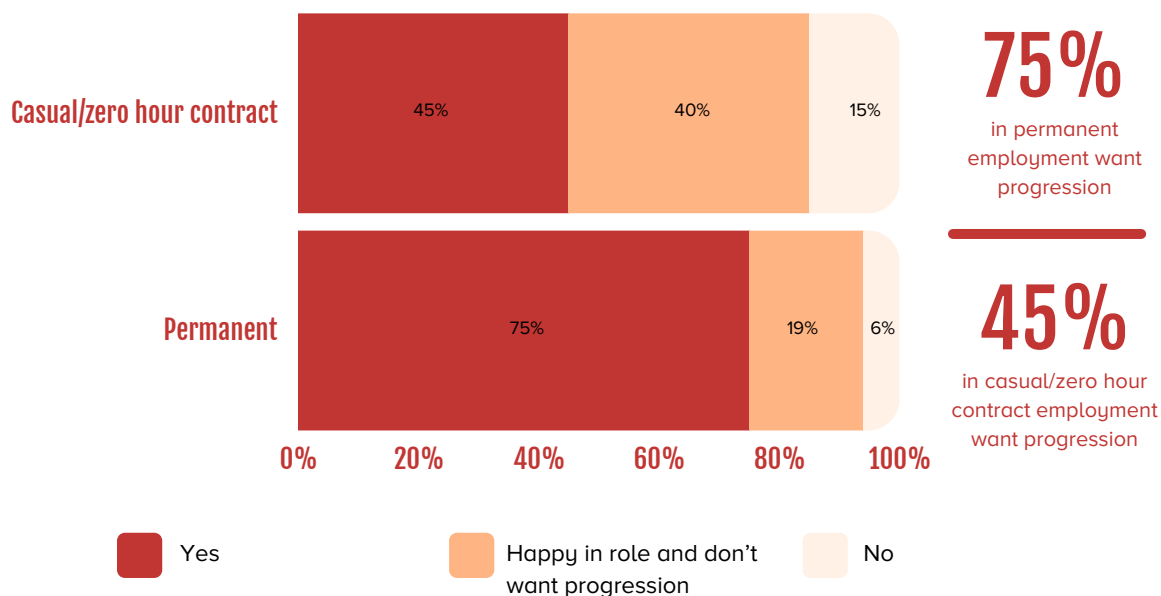
A passion and love of coffee was expressed through the qualitative research interviews, and this lends us to suggest that employers need to promote and reciprocate this shared passion for the industry and empower their workforce through progression pathways and quality roles.

Whilst zero hour contracts do work for some, employers should aim to understand the complexities of their entire workforce. Those that are on flexible contracts who want to progress should be nurtured into the permanent team.

## 5.1 Desire to progress

**70%** of those surveyed said they would like to progress their career within the coffee industry

# EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND PROGRESSION



**Casual/zero hour contract**
- 45%
- 40%
- 15%

**Permanent**
- 75%
- 19%
- 6%

0%  20%  40%  60%  80%  100%

- ■ Yes
- ■ Happy in role and don't want progression
- ■ No

**75%** in permanent employment want progression

**45%** in casual/zero hour contract employment want progression

# ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PROGRESSING YOUR CAREER IN THE COFFEE INDUSTRY?*

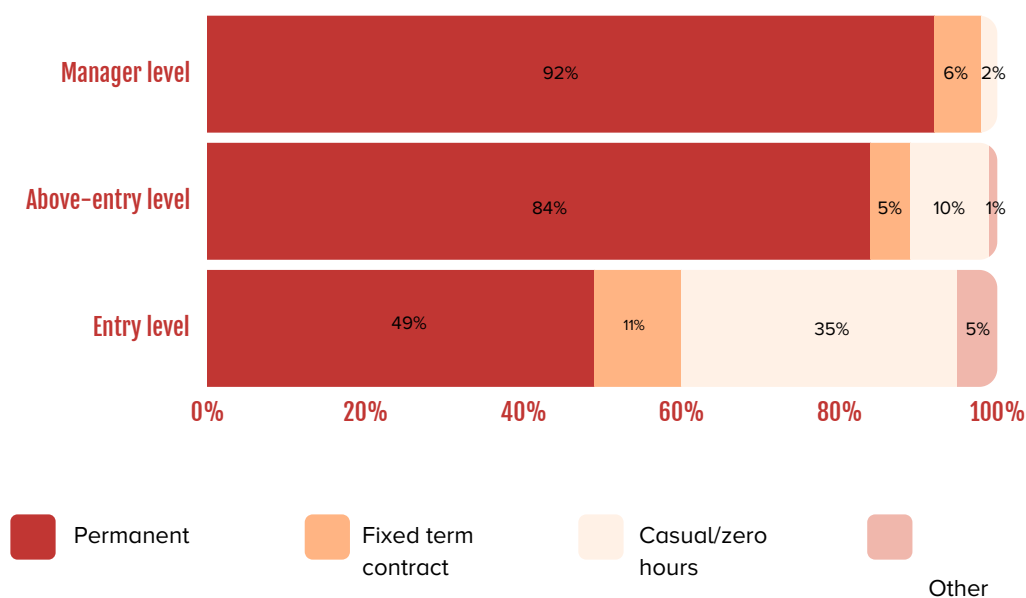I am happy in my current role and don't want to progress
23%



No
7%

Yes
70%
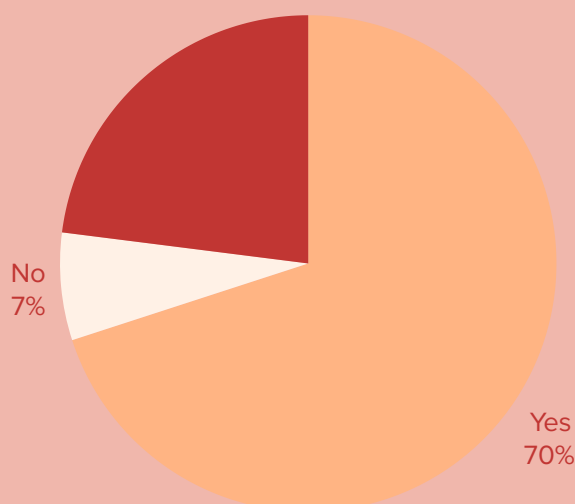
**40%** in casual/zero hour contract employment are happy with their current role and don't want to progress

**19%** in permanent employment are happy with their current role and don't want to progress

*Answered: 226    Skipped: 173

# JOB ROLE AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

| Job Role | Permanent | Fixed term contract | Casual/zero hours | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Manager level | 92% | 6% | 2% | |
| Above-entry level | 84% | 5% | 10% | 1% |
| Entry level | 49% | 11% | 35% | 5% |

0%    20%    40%    60%    80%    100%

**Permanent**   **Fixed term contract**   **Casual/zero hours**   **Other**

## 49%
almost 50% of individuals in entry-level roles have permanent employment status

## 84%
of individuals in above-entry roles have permanent employment status

## 92%
of individuals in manager roles have permanent employment status

# JOB ROLES AND PROGRESSION

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Manager level** | 73% | 17% | 10% |
| **Above-entry level** | 75% | 25% | |
| **Entry level** | 59% | 15% | 26% |

0%    20%    40%    60%    80%    100%

■ Yes    ■ Happy in role and don't want progression    □ No
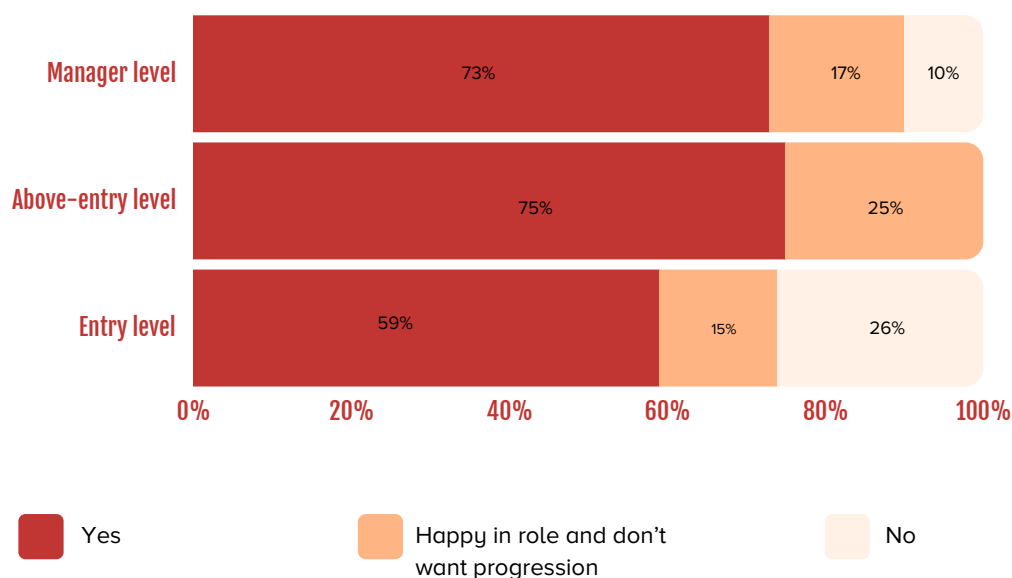
## 73%
of managers want career progression

## 75%
of those in above-entry roles want career progression

## 59%
of individuals in entry-level roles want to progress in a career within coffee

The survey data reveals that 85% of individuals engaged in permanent roles hold positions beyond entry level within the industry, and show higher demand for career progression. Interestingly, 78% of them have been in the industry for two or more years. Meanwhile, a significant fraction of entry-level individuals are in casual/zero-hour contracts, showing less interest in career progression. The survey data also shows that 39% of those in entry-level positions acknowledged other career goals outside the coffee industry, indicating this as one reason they may leave their current roles.

Some employers we spoke to qualitatively noted that they see a split between coffee careerists and those who use a coffee job as supplementary to other work and interests. They also said that the retention level above entry level is stronger, which could be a factor in those at entry level not feeling there is enough opportunity to progress or allowing room for them to do so.

There are two different people that work in the coffee industry, people who are careerists in the coffee industry who love coffee and know that's where they want to go, and then there's another group of people who see working in hospitality as an easy entryway of earning some regular, consistent money...

Owner, Micro-sized employer

If we meet somebody that loves coffee, and it comes across in the interview, then we can say this is the clearly defined pathway where you can get to this place. But I do think there's possibly a ceiling there, unfortunately, and so you kind of need them to diversify as well. They'd need to be competent in being a manager as well, for example....I don't think there are enough jobs out there to get them into everything....
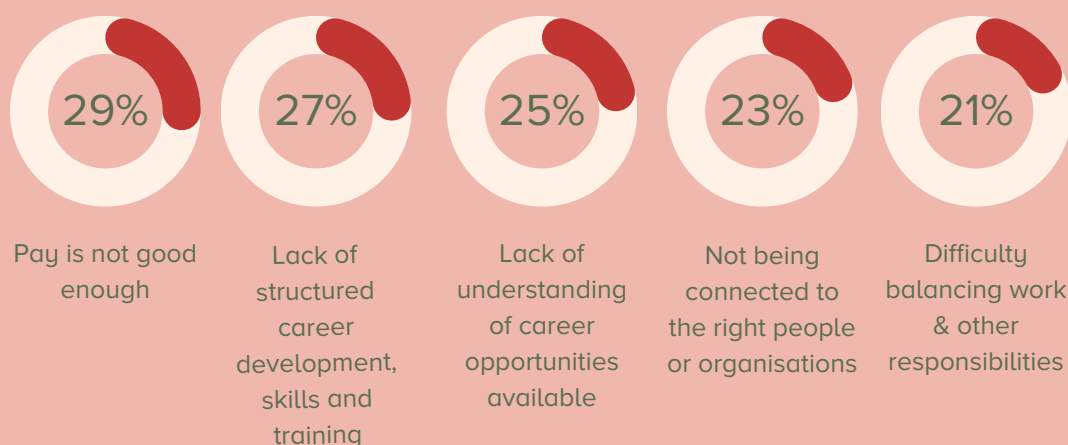
Talent Acquisition Manager, Macro-sized employer

The key point here being that progression is essential to foster quality jobs, work productivities and the retention of talent.

## 5.2 Key Barriers

# Biggest barriers to progression for those currently working in coffee

**29%** — Pay is not good enough

**27%** — Lack of structured career development, skills and training

**25%** — Lack of understanding of career opportunities available

**23%** — Not being connected to the right people or organisations

**21%** — Difficulty balancing work & other responsibilities

We provided a selection of barriers for survey participants to choose from and asked them to select all that applied to them. 29% of individuals still in the industry reported pay as the top barrier, 25% cited a lack of structured career development, 27% cited skills and training and 25% said an unclear understanding of career opportunities available to them. We also asked coffee-industry leavers about barriers they perceived before leaving, and their top two barrier selections matched those still in the industry.

**50%**

of industry leavers cite pay as their primary barrier to progression

**30%**

of industry leavers cited lack of structured career development, training and skills

> It's hard to get opportunities... so having more opportunities would help so you can progress and can actually move into something different.
>
> White, Female, Operations Assistant

> A mentor or coach would be good because my main obstacle is not knowing entirely what there is out there.
>
> Mixed, Non-binary, Barista

The individuals we interviewed echoed the most commonly identified barriers in the survey data. They did highlight some other potential barriers they perceive as important which are outlined on the next page.

## 5.3 Age differences

The secondary research for this project cites age differences playing a role in the lower retention of employees. Interestingly, this was mentioned by the oldest and youngest individuals we interviewed. They both discussed how their respective experiences of generational stereotyping impacted their perception of the industry and their progression. To quantify if age differences act as a significant factor in the retention of people within coffee specifically, further research to explore this particular point would be needed.

The oldest of the interview participants commented that the majority of the staff are half their age and this is something they feel is a barrier to their job satisfaction and progression. They stated how they feel disconnected from the rest of their team and that there is a generational difference in the approach to work and work communications. The youngest interviewee felt their age meant they were not taken seriously. Both accounts suggest a need for employers to invest in strategies to build better 'community feeling' at work.

Maybe I'm too old for it, but I do work hard...and most people are half my age.

Mixed, Male, Barista

Due to my age, there was a massive divide in how we could relate to each other, and I just feel like I was treated like a child...
and I just hope now that I'm older that the same biases that stopped me before and made me feel outcasted before won't be there again.

## 5.4 Gender

The secondary research highlighted that despite the implementation of many initiatives such as flexible working hours, family-friendly policies, and gender awareness training, only 11% of large hospitality enterprises have a female in a senior management position, and women are paid 3.45% less than men (Calinaud et. al., 2020). The data from the primary research didn't interrogate this in detail, but through the interviews respondents cited gender acting as a barrier to progression in certain roles and three of the four females we interviewed mentioned their gender acting as a potential barrier to progression.

> I applied for a role that was split between the shop floor and the roastery...I was unsuccessful...I think here the problem could be gender...I think it could be seen as easier for men to work in roasting.

White, Female, Barista

> I competed in the barista championships, and I noticed there was only one Black competitor, and the majority were males... I just struggle to wrap my head around why it's still so white male dominated...as you go up the ladder, you can see it's still very bias in terms of who has decision-making roles.

Asian, Female, Account Manager

## 5.5 Ethnicity

Employers we interviewed also noted this as an issue and it links to the secondary research about lack of senior level representation from minoritised communities in leadership positions in the hospitality industry.

> I feel like there is definitely more that could be done for people who are ethnic minorities. I think there are a lot of ethnic minorities who go into barista work, but I don't see them progressing into bigger roles, more decision-making roles. And obviously, I can't speak for everyone. I don't know if that's because it's not as readily available to them, there's an unknown bias, or if they feel like they don't belong there. Because I just feel people want to go somewhere that they feel there's people like them.

Asian, Female, Account Manager

> I mean, even though we see diversity on social media from the companies, if I went into the headquarters, the head offices, it's just all white men.

Asian, Female, Ex-barista

> In our work, I will say it's still pretty white. You don't have a ton of diversity in the office, for example. I'd say in the cafe, it's a lot more diverse and not particularly one group of any type of people and a very big mixture and then in the roastery, there is a mixture but still pretty white.

White, Female, Operations Assistant

As previously mentioned, the employers we spoke to also referred to challenges linked to equality, diversity and inclusion in coffee.

> I had some training about recruitment because diversity and inclusivity is a challenge...it still is a very white and middle-class industry, and there are a number of barriers that exist, including people not knowing what is available in terms of a career in coffee.

Operations Director,
Small-sized employer

A smaller proportion of overall survey participants (12%) cited not seeing someone like them in senior roles as a barrier to progression. To accurately quantify personal barriers linked to equality, diversity, and inclusion and how they impact career progression for individuals within the coffee industry specifically, it would be prudent to undertake further research.

This research presents some specific dimensions of the industry that would really value greater exploration.

## 5.6 Personal fulfilment and progression

This section aims to look into greater detail into why people want to progress in coffee and the qualitative data that clearly demonstrated a love and passion for coffee.

All individuals we spoke to expressed an interest in progressing their careers within the coffee industry. Over 50% expressed a desire to own their own coffee business in the future. Also, those currently not working in the industry plan to rejoin if the circumstances permit them to do so. Here are some of their thoughts on what within the coffee industry interests them and hopes they have for their personal progression.

I am on a SCA trainer course, and training people is something I definitely want to get more into

Mixed, Male,
Head Barista

I want to have more knowledge and feel more confident in my role.

White, Female,
Barista

Probably a brand ambassador instead of working behind the bar because there is a limit to what you can learn behind the bar. I would like to attend events and spread the brand image.

Asian, Female,
Ex-Head Barista

If I am able to own my own business, it would make me feel like I've achieved something, and it means that when I eventually have children, I can pass something onto them...I can't pass on a barista role to them.

Mixed, Male,
Barista

And I think if I was to progress, it would most likely be trying to go into similar roles, but hopefully higher up eventually. I don't necessarily want to be in a position where I'm managing other people. I'm going to see how things go naturally at the moment.

White, Female,
Operations Assistant

Ideally, I'd love to have my own little van or the manager of a little shop where you go in and open up each day.

White, Male,
Barista

When I was doing the level one barista course, the kind of career pathway that looked the most interesting to me was like tasting and Q grading, and potentially green coffee buying as well.

Mixed, Non-Binary,
Barista

# 6. EXIT FACTORS: WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING THE INDUSTRY?

This section aimed to understand the relationship between joining factors and exit factors. It also helps us understand how the barriers that exist might be drivers for people to leave the industry.

We asked those surveyed to select the three most likely reasons that would or did cause them to leave the industry. Poor benefits topped the list which includes pay, bonuses and holidays. 49% leave the industry because the benefits are not good enough.

One of them is low pay....as in the effort, and the stress on us doesn't really reflect in the pay...it's always been so low compared to other industries.....

Asian, female,
Ex-Head Barista

**25%**
of those still working in the industry reported "career goals outside of coffee" as reasons to leave

**30%**
of those still working in the industry reported "better work/life balance" as reasons to leave

**23%**
of coffee industry leavers selected "lack of training and progression" as the reason that caused them to leave

Individuals we interviewed mentioned the following as some reasons that could also factor into individuals leaving:

- Unfair demands and expectations, particularly versus the pay received
- Style of management not being as supportive or encouraging as they'd like
- Profit-driven focus as opposed to the quality of coffee standards, service, and overall well-being of employees
- Misconceptions about a career in coffee and a lack of understanding of the career pathways available

I worked for an agency as a barista in some places where I wouldn't even make coffee for myself because other people working there don't care about the quality...and I am not paid enough to show them differently.

White, Female, Barista

Because I have gone for trial interviews before where the owners have not been a barista before, and you can see that what they expect is not the reality of what can be done... and it can lead to an unrealistic expectation.

White, Female, Operations Assistant

So, where I am right now, even if I do well...there is only ridicule...there is no encouragement, and that's another reason I chose to leave this employer.

Mixed, Male, Barista

I think being a little bit more open-minded and if they were a little bit less profit-driven, I think a lot of things would be better...and thinking about how to keep your good employees, instead of offering the opportunity when they decide to leave.

Asian, Female, Ex-Barista

## Key Points

- The survey showed key reasons to leave the industry include unsatisfactory compensation, work-life balance, other career goals and lack of training and progression opportunities.
- Qualitative data expressed pay, unfair work demands vs pay, management style issues, a focus on profit over quality, being undervalued as a barista and a lack of recognition.
- These reasons become even more compelling when added to a lack of training and career development opportunities and when linking to the reasons people join in the first place. People are joining due to a passion for coffee and this seems not to be harnessed whilst people are in post.

# 7. EMPLOYER INSIGHT

This section was garnered from the qualitative interviews with employers with the aim to understand how the industry is currently working to empower staff, areas of best practice and potential areas for development. We spoke to 9 employers of different sizes. We asked them what challenges they face with recruitment and retention of staff. The most commonly mentioned challenges across the board of employers were:

| Staff shortages | Financial pressures | Lack of representation at senior levels | Viability of career and defined pathways |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employers of all sizes mentioned the impact of Brexit and COVID on the available talent pool, citing fewer people to choose from. They also reported a significant difference in the calibre and experience of available candidates. | The coffee industry, being a tight profit margin industry, was flagged as a challenge with rising costs exacerbating this. This impacts smaller scale employers because balancing profitability with fair wages is challenging. Another challenge connected to this is the time and budget available for the learning and development of staff. | Employers discussed a strong desire to improve industry diversity and attract and retain staff who feel represented at all levels. | The misconceptions about coffee offering a viable career with progression opportunities were cited by employers as a challenge alongside not being well-publicised enough. Linked to this is the need to better demonstrate a defined career pathway to help recruit and retain staff. |
| "Covid and Brexit have had an effect...a lot of people left the industry, meaning a smaller pool of talent. Then, that leads to the challenge of having people with the right level and skills. So, where we would have been inundated previously with applications, we are having to be more open-minded and take responsibility for training staff because they are not at the same level anymore."<br><br>Operations Director, Small-sized employer | "We commit to the London Living Wage because it's the right thing to do...but it's a challenge to get the balance right between ensuring everyone gets paid fairly whilst still being a profitable business."<br><br>Owner, Small-sized employer | "How do we keep people in the industry...people need to see themselves represented, and they're not, not at a senior level."<br><br>Account Director, Macro-sized employer | "I think what is currently missing is a defined career path..."<br><br>CEO, Medium-sized employer<br><br>"I'm sure there are many people who love coffee, but they don't know the roles that go with it. It's sort of, oh, we go to Starbucks, and someone makes that coffee, and it's kind of done, and it's lovely and off I go. But, if they did love it that much, how would they know that there is a career in it? It's not that well-publicised."<br><br>Talent Acquisition Manager, Macro-sized employer |

| SIZE OF EMPLOYER | RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES |
|---|---|
| Micro (0 – 10) | • Offering as many extra perks and benefits as possible (wine tasting, London Coffee Festival)<br>• Providing flexibility for staff in terms of shifts<br>• Giving additional responsibility to staff to build trust and respect |
| Small (11 – 50) | • Cashless tip system to top-up wages<br>• Streamlined food and drink offer post COVID to streamline processes |
| Medium (51 - 249) | • Set a 70% of internal promotions target<br>• Training on-site from Head Baristas<br>• Regular pay reviews<br>• Enhanced benefits package |
| Large (250 – 999) | • Investing in learning and development overall<br>• Offering supplier days and quarterly all staff meetings to keep in touch with overall business performance |
| Macro (1,000+) | • Internal apprenticeships<br>• Training academies<br>• An extra day off for a birthday<br>• Recruiting Head of ED&I |

## Key points:

- Employers' challenges around recruitment echo the survey data - i.e pay and a lack of training opportunities are a key barrier to progression alongside a lack of representation in senior roles.
- Strategies employers are using to improve recruitment and retention aim to transform the industry and help more employees see the coffee industry as a fulfilling, viable long-term career.
- The barriers and exit factors paint a picture that training and career progression are key to retaining staff as well as career awareness and understanding that coffee can be a viable long term career.

# 8. WHAT COULD HELP PROGRESSION

We provided a selection of barriers for survey participants to choose from and asked them to select all that applied to them. 29% of individuals still in the industry reported pay as the top barrier, 25% cited a lack of structured career development, 27% cite skills and training and 25% said an unclear understanding of career opportunities available to them. We also asked coffee-industry leavers about barriers they perceived before leaving, and their top two barrier selections matched those still in the industry.

## 8.1 Skills

### What would you like to do as part of a coffee career development programme?
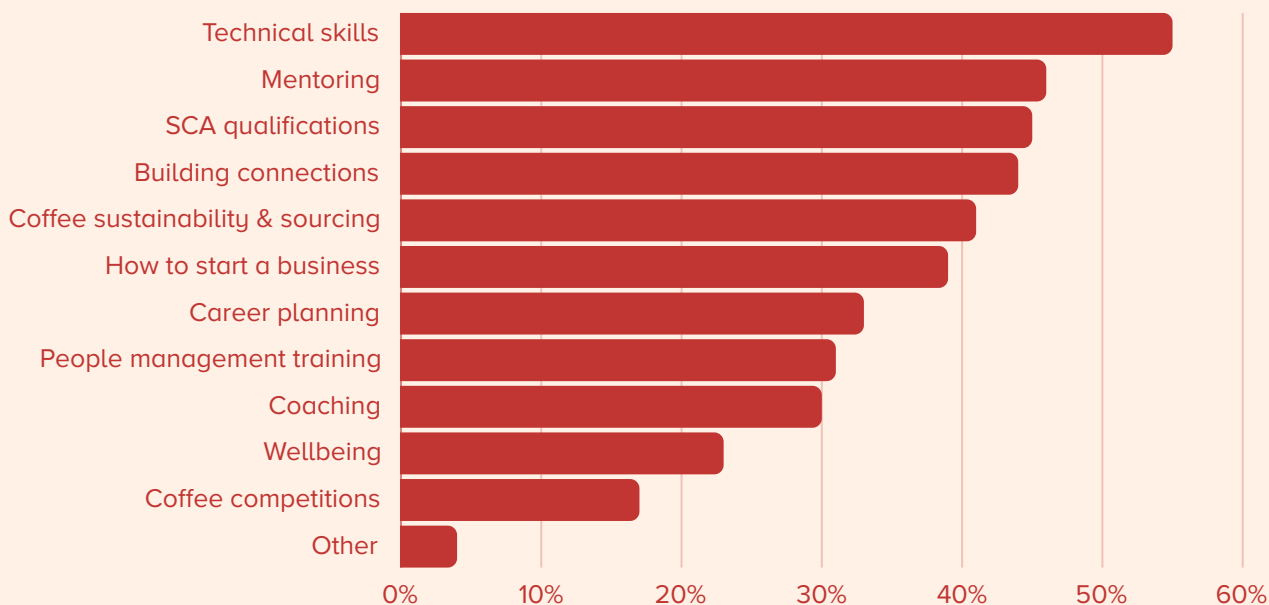


We asked those interested in progressing their career to select the elements they would like included in a coffee career development programme.

The most popular across the board for survey participants are:
- Technical skills 55%
- Mentoring 46%
- Specialty Coffee Association qualifications 45%
- Building connections 44%
- Coffee sustainability and sourcing 41%
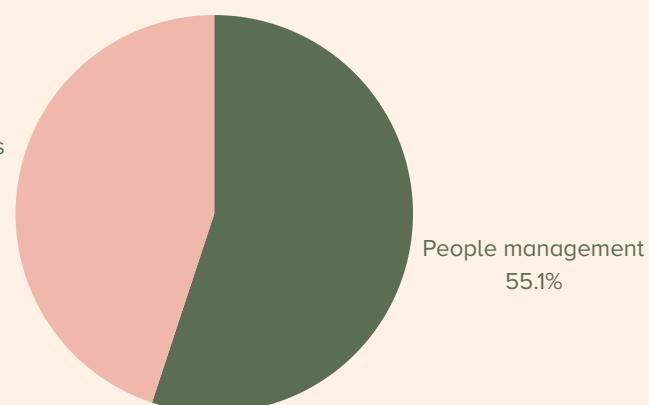- How to start a business 39%

## 8.2 Job roles and skill gaps

We have looked at the three most popular survey selections according to job level to understand how this plays a part in the skill gaps that individuals perceive.
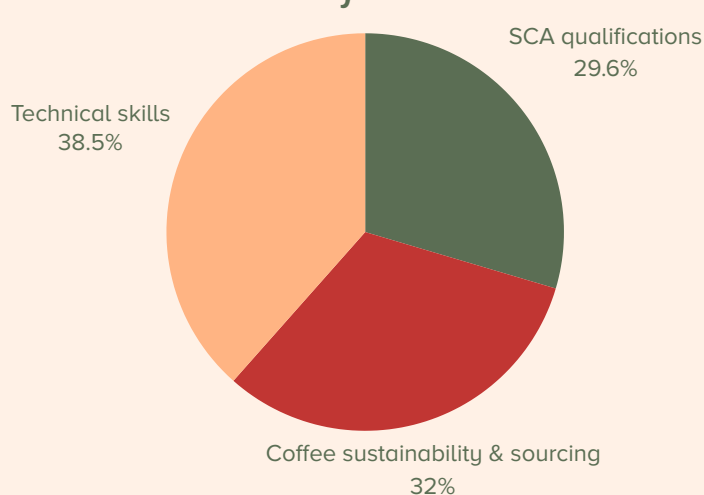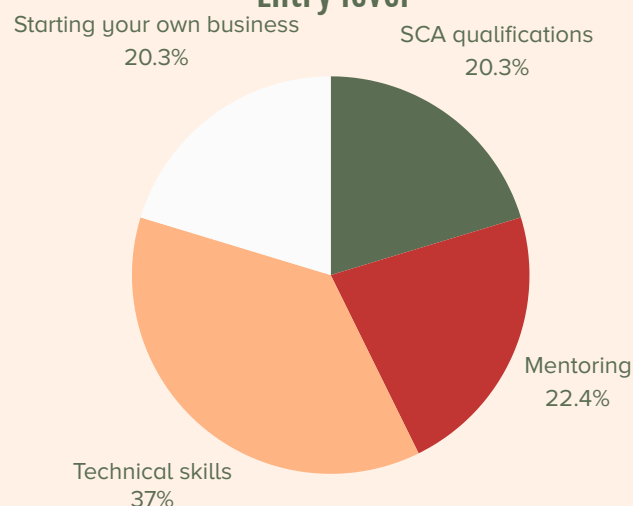
### Manager level

Technical skills
31.5%

Building connection
31.5%

Building connections
44.9%

Mentoring
37%

### Sole trader/business owner

People management
55.1%

### Above entry-level

SCA qualifications
29.6%

Technical skills
38.5%

Coffee sustainability & sourcing
32%

### Entry level

Starting your own business
20.3%

SCA qualifications
20.3%

Mentoring
22.4%

Technical skills
37%
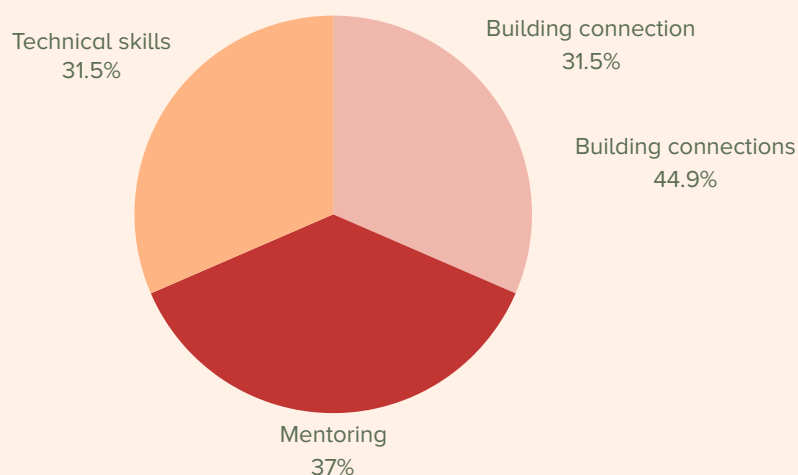
- Individuals in managerial positions expressed diverse preferences by selecting most of the available options in the survey. Their choices are distributed relatively evenly compared to other job roles that showed more popular selections. This could indicate that those in management feel they need some additional training to perform at their best.

- 67% of individuals working in micro-sized employers cite SCA qualifications as a choice, showing the significance of an accredited qualification.

- Around 50% of individuals across all sizes of employers selected mentoring as a choice. This indicates a mentoring offer gap, even where an employer is larger and has more resources. A mentor can help raise awareness and understanding of the career opportunities within the coffee industry and how to progress careers. The individuals we spoke to qualitatively explained that a mentor would significantly help them to better navigate the coffee industry and confidence levels about how to progress.

# 8.3 Skill gaps and needs

We asked the individuals and employers we interviewed qualitatively about the training, skills and learning they would like and have yet to access. Here is a summary of what they both identified.

| Individuals | Employers |
|---|---|
| Technical skills (advanced latte art, machine maintenance, roasting) | Career navigation and planning – how to create your own opportunities |
| Employee rights and how to approach conversations about pay, progression, and work environment generally | Business acumen and commercial awareness |
| Business skills and operations (Excel, profit and loss, finances, etc.) | Leadership skills and managing people |
| SCA qualifications | Increasing confidence and building resilience |
| Networking & mentorship | Troubleshooting – how to handle personal and workplace challenges |
| Health and safety (including specific things to coffee, i.e. Burns and treating them) | |
| Mental Health First Aid | |
| Sensory and tasting | |

The individuals' views strongly support the survey data and show that technical skills, SCA qualifications and understanding how to navigate the work environment better are important to them. Employers we spoke to qualitatively focused more on soft skills and mentioned that the technical skills are important but can be taught more easily on the job than things like leadership skills and the mechanics of running a coffee business.

> We're a smaller business, so we don't have anything official. It's not like, you know, I spent years working for Starbucks, and it was like, fill out your next module, become a supervisor. Normally, we have a vacancy or someone, and we'll look around and say, look, do you want an opportunity? It's a small team, so we know pretty much what they want to do and where they want to go.

Owner, Small-sized employer

> The tracking of L&D is super unstructured because we aren't that big, but it is something we want to put a lot of attention into next year, but we haven't built the programme yet. So, at the moment, it's ad-hoc.

CEO, Large-sized employer

In terms of the career development on offer with employers, the larger and macro-sized employers did refer to offering training but in an ad-hoc way, with no overall structured plan for individuals. Those of a smaller size posed resources, time, and budget as challenges to offering a structured career development programme. Although this is the case for smaller employers, they discussed the other ways they supplement employees' learning and show a genuine commitment to providing as many opportunities as possible, for example, partnering with roasters, offering top-up training, running internal latte art competitions, and shadowing different roles.

| Individuals | Employers |
| --- | --- |
| All individuals who have completed training with Well Grounded cited this experience as some of the best they have received. | Macro-sized employer with training academies internally, including a barista academy and apprenticeships. |
| Employers offer cupping events and the opportunity for individuals to run them on their own regularly. | One of the Medium-sized employers offers clear career pathways and training to support individuals with an additional offer of apprenticeships. This same employer focuses on promoting from within as much as possible. |
| Youth Academy, sponsored by Victoria Eduardo, offers scholarships for a career development programme for 18 – 30-year-olds that is worth £3,000. | Well Grounded was regarded highly by all employers we spoke to, and they cited the high quality of the training for those starting out in coffee. |
| James Hoffmann was mentioned for his engaging and helpful online tutorials. | Danny Meyer was mentioned for his attitude: look after your employees, and they will look after your customers. |

## 8.5 Potential Structure of a programme

### How would you prefer to do any learning or training?
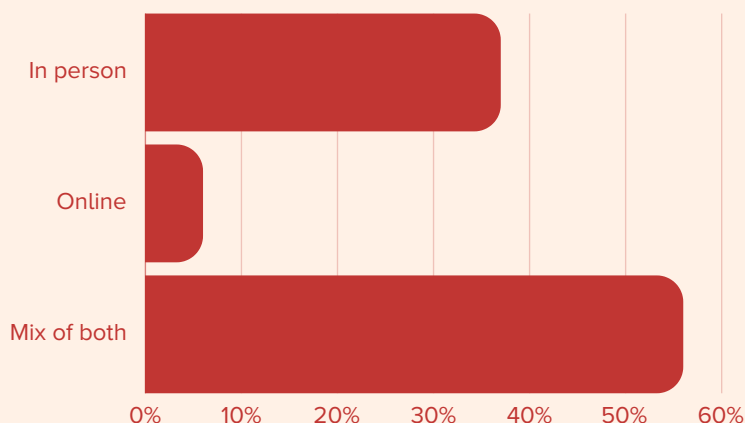


# 56% of survey participants cited a mixed methods delivery as their preference

The individuals we spoke to also commented on the preference for a mixed methods approach. They emphasised the importance of having in-person elements for practical-based training. They said it also helps to build a network of peers and contacts within the coffee industry. They noted an online aspect would allow them to join from anywhere without the added travel time.

### Accreditation individuals would like from a development programme



**71%**
Coffee specific

**64%**
Non coffee accreditation (non-technical skills)

**16%**
Non-accredited
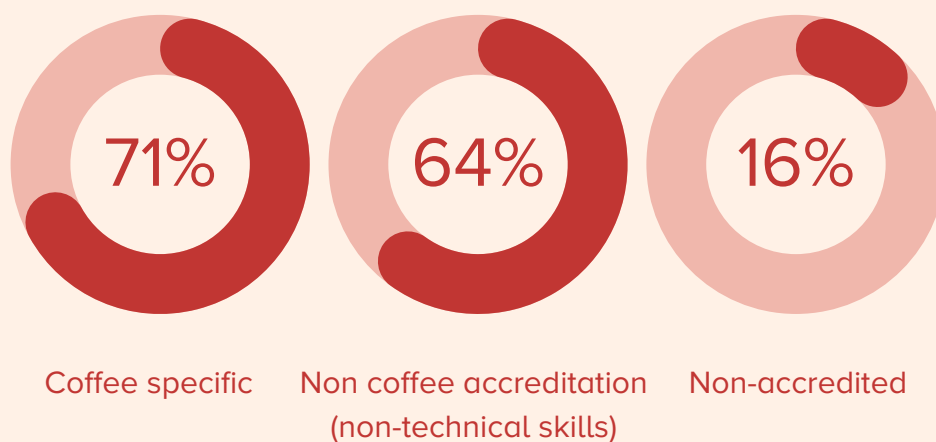
## Employer support

**20%**
No

**80%**
Yes

There is a high indication from the survey data that individuals would like a learning programme to offer some form of accreditation.

80% want their employers' support, and involvement is also supported by the individuals we spoke to.

> Yes, I would like my employer involved because then everybody is held accountable...and allowing me the time off to go and do training courses...because, yes, it's benefiting me, but it's also benefiting the company. If I'm better at my job, then ultimately the quality improves.

Mixed, Male,
Barista

## 8.6 Employers' perspective

The nine employers we interviewed declared they would happily support their staff members to undertake a career development programme. They would do what they can regarding budget, flexibility of shifts and allowing time for the training during work hours. Factors such as money, resources and capacity were cited as things that would play a part in the level of involvement each employer could commit to.

> We would like to have updates on their progress. We have a responsibility as a team to help the students succeed. One of the things we do with another training partner is we get a quarterly update about the learners' progress and to do a review of how they are doing. So, I think something like this would be useful.

Chief Commercial Officer,
Macro-sized employer

> We'd pay for our staff to have that training; I'd be happy to help develop the programme, and I'd be really open to help in any way because it would be great for the industry.

CEO, Large-sized
employer

> We would look at some budget for a programme like this. I think it's important; employees are such a massive part of your business and are on the customer-facing side. They are the people that represent your business when you aren't there, so the better prepared they can be, then all the better.

Owner, Micro-sized
employer

## 8.7 The Impact and benefit of a coffee career development programme

Individuals told us how a career development programme would benefit them. A clear message was that a programme would be very meaningful to them on a personal level and that it would bring added value to their employers. Employers were asked about their view of a career development programme and how it relates to their business and the wider coffee industry.

> I think with the recruitment pool being smaller, having people who want to work in coffee and know exactly where they want to go is a massive bonus.

Owner, small-sized employer

> If I had further training, it would be beneficial to my manager and make their job easier.

White, Male, Barista

> I'm sure you know that businesses with more diversity and leadership teams are more profitable businesses. We need to take initiatives like this out of the 'nice to do and CSR box ticking' into 'there is a genuine business reason to do this.' And if our business strategy post-covid is about accelerating growth, then actually, unless you address the lack of diversity at leadership level, you're never going to be able to do that.

Account Director, Macro-sized employer

> Improving my skills and getting more confident...even down to just the little things, like that milk training, for example, I'm now wasting less milk at work, so it means that things are a bit more efficient, you know I'm not wasting as much milk, and we can use more of it.

Mixed, Non-binary, Barista

> It builds a better relationship with my employer because if I think that my employer wants me to progress in the company, then I'll probably progress with them...if I feel appreciated in the company I'm in, then I will stick there, I will stay there.

Mixed, Male, Barista

## Key Points

- There are a number of elements that individuals and employers need support with in order to empower progression.
- Employers of all sizes can do things to contribute to a learning environment that supports the skill development of employees.
- Coffee specific training is very popular for individuals.
- Mentoring is a primary preference to support progression.
- There is demand for a structured learning programme, supported by employers.
- Employers recognise the importance of leadership skills, personal development and business acumen, whilst individuals place higher focus on technical skills.
- Individuals place a stronger emphasis on technical skills and how to manage conversations about pay and progression.

# 9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Findings of the report demonstrate a genuine passion for the industry amongst employees and employers. But with 70% of individuals surveyed wanting career progression and 68% leaving the industry within two years, it's our belief there is an opportunity to ensure coffee is seen as a viable career.

Whilst work benefits are key to ensure retention, we believe a focus on career opportunities and education will ensure a more diverse and successful industry.

## 1. Training and Development

Structured and unstructured internal or external training and development to ensure coffee is seen as a viable career option, providing the skills, knowledge, qualifications and most importantly networking and mentoring opportunities for people to thrive. Important for employers here is creating clear career pathways for careerists for the wide scope of opportunities available. For temporary workers employers could try to spark a long-term interest through education, more industry exposure and training opportunities.

## 2. Inclusion

For a more empowered workforce organisations need to ensure that their culture, systems, processes and communications are adapted, refined and improved for the entire workforce so that ethnicity, gender, age and other diversity characteristics are not barriers to progression.

## 3. Collaboration

Key to this research was the identification that employers and employees have identified similar barriers and opportunities for progress. A collaborative approach where transparency, communication and accountability are key will help to make long lasting change. Throughout the research a slight disconnect between employees' understanding of what was possible against the challenges employers are facing to make it happen was identified. Through collaboration mutual strategies for progress could be identified.

## 4. Further Research

Greater analysis into the link between barriers to progression with a more representative sample will help us to identify more clearly the initial findings on gender and ethnicity barriers. This in turn will ensure the solutions are fully inclusive.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**London**          **Bristol**