

# The Exmoor and Coast Centre of Excellence for Hospitality

## Delivering Careers and Opportunity across our area

### Vision

*Last Updated- 10 July 2022*

***The Exmoor & Coast Centre of Excellence is a forum of area stakeholders, partners and businesses who are working together to develop and promote opportunity, training and education in hospitality to deliver a long term, sustainable solution for recruitment issues for the area.***



CROSS LANE  
HOUSE



<https://www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/business-hub/centre-of-excellence>

*'The opportunities in food and hospitality are almost immeasurable. Whether you dream of being a baker, a pastry chef, the proprietor of a restaurant, a wine sommelier or a publican the possibilities are endless. And with so many vacancies in related industries now really is the time to find a role in food and drink. But first we need to unlock, to uncover and to reveal those aspirations. Many people today find it almost impossible to find a focus in their lives, to understand what's possible, to realise what talents they possess.*

*With partners in kitchens across Exmoor, in cafes, in colleges, on farms and in small businesses I believe we can shine a light on careers in this sector. Everyone is good at something, it's just that they might not know it, or know how to make the best of it.*

*Hospitality really is a business that can nurture both the quiet and the noisy talent. It takes all sorts and it needs all sorts. I'm so happy and energised to support this vital initiative.*

*I can't wait to meet, to speak, to welcome and to encourage people into this most wonderful and unique of industries. **Through food we can change lives and give people an appetite for a great career.'***



**William Sitwell;** food writer, restaurant critic, broadcaster and founder/host of William Sitwell's Supper Club, Rooks Nest Farm, Greater Exmoor.

## Executive Summary

**60% of all employment in the Greater Exmoor area is dependent on the Visitor Economy.** This delivers 54% of the areas GVA<sup>1</sup> and contributes £431m into the area economy each year<sup>1</sup>.

Key to the “Exmoor and Coast” area’s appeal are the unique heritage and natural assets across the area with Exmoor National Park at the centre, which spans almost 270 square miles across West Somerset and North Devon. Our stunning landscapes are also home to a vibrant mix of small towns and picturesque villages to tiny hamlets and individual farmsteads, all playing a vital part in the visitor experience. This is a working landscape that hosts 100s of micro businesses, many of them focused on a high quality hospitality offering.

The area boasts restaurants, pubs, cafes and tea rooms who further support the local economy by championing local produce. This is high quality and has a strong brand; from fresh produce like mouth-watering oysters, grass-fed lamb, beef and rare breed pork to products including confectionary, teas and coffees, gin, ale chutneys and preserves.

**Recruitment challenges** are particularly prevalent in the hospitality industry where, demonstrating long term career opportunity, enabling access to training and education and motivating people into careers in the area in hospitality has been a long standing issue that reflects the areas broader challenges, for example;

- The Social Mobility Index 2016, West Somerset was the least likely area in the country for children from a disadvantaged background to do well at school and get a good job, coming 324th out of 324 areas.
- Across the area and particularly in North Devon, the rising costs of properties and rents make affordable housing unachievable amongst our working communities.

These factors coupled with the pandemic have heightened recruitment challenges for our hospitality businesses. Employees placed on furlough have found alternative employment or are hesitant to return to perceived unsociable hours and low pay within hospitality. In addition a lack of EU workers in our larger hospitality business combined with a combination of low-level skills, seasonality, poor connectivity and a historic lack of investment in capital and infrastructure has **diminished the workforce** to a point where many otherwise sound and profitable businesses either cannot operate or have had to significantly change their offering and opening times, as well as challenging our micro businesses existence this directly **shrinks out visitor offering and reduces the area economy**. The industry is already challenged, during the pandemic in 2020 annual visitor days dropped by 50% and visitor income by 45% as a result of lockdowns and restrictions<sup>2</sup>. This year soaring cost of living has hit hospitality business from both sides impacting their own operations and uncertainty and changes in visitor spending.

However, **there are new opportunities** here – with ‘staycations’ increasing in popularity, many businesses saw a change in their customer profile in 2020, with 45% recording an increase in first time visitors. In 2021, 99% of visitors rated their Visit to the area Good or very Good<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating that Exmoor’s natural assets to create a unique and satisfying visitor experience that appeals to nature lovers, adventure seekers and holidaymakers alike. However to maximise these opportunities our excellent food and drink hospitality offering must be preserved and protected from current challenges as it is a critical part of delivering this experience.

**It is imperative that we look to the future and address these challenges via a clear, committed and coordinated strategy that supports Exmoor’s Economy to prosper and thrive.**

***As an area we need to invest in our people, joining together to find and implement short, medium- and long-term solutions that link training and skills to employment, productivity and career progression.***

***This can only be achieved working with our micro and SME small businesses, driving the adoption of a culture of employment excellence, demonstrably offering and delivering careers, training and opportunity.***

The CoE has already achieved so much, focused on what we can achieve organically and with small scale grants and support. **We are now motivating for the larger scale investment required to enable an accelerated strategy to attract and inspire young people, their parents and career starters to consider a career in hospitality.**

<sup>1</sup> Greater Exmoor Area STEAM DATA 2019 and 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Greater Exmoor Visitor Survey 2021

## Key Factors Impacting Recruitment in Hospitality

Key area stakeholders and businesses have come together to form the Exmoor and Coast Centre of Excellence for Hospitality. In developing our vision and plan we have considered key factors impacting recruitment in hospitality in the area:

1. The historic perception of the industry as an entry level or temporary job, rather than a career of choice resulting in:
  - Failure to attract the best candidates
  - Lack of investment in education and training, hence low levels of skills
  - Low pay, meaning that the majority of young people struggle to get on the housing ladder
  - Seasonality, leading to uncertainties around demand and staffing levels.
2. Rapid digitalisation, with many micro and lifestyle businesses reluctant or unable to invest and adapt.
3. A historic, perceived disconnect between school and college curriculum offers and the skills training employers actually need.
4. A lack of training opportunities rooted in the real world and with a direct line of sight to permanent employment in the area.
5. A lack of transport infrastructure, resulting in an inability to access skills interventions.
6. The mass exodus of Exmoor's young people, who migrate in search of education, career and progression opportunities, and perceive few options to return.
7. A waste of valuable investment in duplication and overlap in much of the free training, advice and support programmes for SME and Micro businesses across the area.

## The Vision

Working in partnership, with a shared vision, passion, enthusiasm and commitment, the CoE will:

- Collate, signpost and promote opportunities for training and education for those entering a career in hospitality across the area.
- Work together to support education partners to deliver relevant and needed training.
- Provide a central forum which will enable local authorities and partners to work together for smart use of available investments in supporting training of SMEs and micro businesses to assist them in becoming employer of choice.
- Revitalise the workforce by creating opportunity and building a culture of professionalism and pride.
- Aspirational promotion of opportunity within hospitality, will drive a positive cycle of adoption and prominence for the CoE and in turn, highlighting our phenomenal hospitality offering will add to our foodie branding of the Exmoor and Coast area and driving increased.
- Deliver strong, cohesive branding and targeted events, promotions and campaigns, building strong connections and networks with schools, colleges and the trainees engaged in hospitality across the area.

**By harnessing our combined expertise and resources we will attract, motivate and develop the skilled hospitality workforce that Exmoor-based businesses need and a long term, sustainable solution for recruitment issues in hospitality.**

**The vision is to foster and develop:**

- A sustainable and growing local network of talented, passionate and locally trained hospitality staff who are retained in area.
- Commitment and drive from our local hospitality businesses to work in partnership as never before and contribute to the CoE's overarching aim of achieving excellence in employment, opportunity and career progression.
- A reputation for excellence within Exmoor in attracting, developing and retaining talent and excellence in hospitality skills.

**The benefits for the area are:**

- The creation/retention of the skilled, professional workforce that businesses in Exmoor need now, and in the future.
- An increased contribution to the health of the local economy, via the delivery of a unique and high-quality consumer/visitor experience that has universal appeal and capitalises on Exmoor's natural heritage assets.
- Outstanding opportunities for education, training and the sharing of best practice that not only retain local talent in area but also attract new talent and inward investment.
- An opportunity to overcome existing barriers to career progression, social mobility and connectivity issues via blended learning models that are accessible 24/7 via a laptop and internet connection.
- Further enhancement of the Exmoor 'brand', highlighting produce and foodie credentials.
- Improved opportunities for those from non-academic backgrounds or with additional learning needs to achieve work readiness and progress.

## CoE Achievements to Date

Our first steps were to focus on what we could achieve as a forum organically with little dependency on grant funding.

To support initial phases the partners involved have already shown their commitment and passion, the value of resource and other contributions and is already estimated to be around £25,000 and in addition we have benefitted from small grants and contributions from North Devon and Somerset local authorities and organisations.

- We have already bought together the existing assets and information to establish a single CoE community and brand that represents businesses, employees, trainees and apprentices across the Greater Exmoor area\*.
- This is bought together on the CoE webpage: <https://www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/business-hub/centre-of-excellence>

\*Through a networks grant from Somerset County council we have a small amount of budget to continue to evolve the structure and content on the webpage.

The next step has been to build the foundations of networks for our area employers and trainees and students engaged in hospitality. These will be delivered through strong, cohesive branding and targeted events, that enable us to build strong connections and networks that drive a positive cycle of adoption and prominence for the CoE.

Aligned to this are events and that have/are taking place this year:

- Bridgewater & Taunton College and Petroc college attended the Visit Exmoor networking event in April, speaking to area businesses about the value of embracing apprenticeship and intern programmes.
- In July, we saw the final of the the Exmoor Young Chef competition which is a first step in the hospitality industry engaging with schools and education. <https://www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/top-skills-displayed-in-exmoor-young-chef-final>
- In the Autumn we will be running a 1<sup>st</sup> networking event for all hospitality students, trainees and apprentices working and training hospitality across the area to establish a recognised network and identity.

The Somerset Local Authority Networks grant is also enabling us to bring on board part time project office support which will support the partners in delivering our next steps. We are also onboarding more and more area businesses to be part of the CoE.

Alongside this, we are generating and supporting a range of consumer promotions within the area – for example, the current **#EatExmoor** and campaign and **Produced on Exmoor** branding highlighting the exceptional quality of Exmoor's produce and unique hospitality experience.

There is so much more we can do. This is reflected in the cohesive 5 year plan we have put together to deliver to enable an accelerated strategy to attract and inspire young people, their parents and career starters to consider a career in hospitality.

**Our next step is to motivate for large scale funding to enable us to implement this plan and deliver tangible outcomes.**

## Future Potential – 5 Year Plan

The CoE are also actively seeking funding from the Government and are investigating opportunity from Levelling Up funding and Prosperity funding. To be successful any large scale investments must:

- Engage and continue to bring together key area stakeholders, sector organisations and partners and eradicate duplication in delivery.
- Address key factors to support continued improvement of Social Mobility and support those furthest from the workplace in our rural areas, including ensuring that there is investment to enable transport and travel to education, remote learning, digital connectivity and IT equipment for students, trainees and apprenticeships.
- Level Up existing workforce in hospitality Incentives for businesses to create opportunities for work experience, work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Include revenue funding to develop and deliver new, blended curricula/course materials and teaching and mentoring staff
- Support businesses and provide incentives to create opportunities for work experience, work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Include the branding, promotion and communications that enables the Exmoor CoE as a strong, trusted and known channel for excellence in training, skills and opportunity.

## Investment Required

The CoE team have structured and scoped a comprehensive program, requiring investment (over a 5 year period), noting that the value and scope will depend on specific grant criteria. A summary of full project costs and plan will be provided for relevant discussions.

## Outcomes

- The CoE is recognised as the channel for first-class education & training for the sector in the area.
- There is a significant increase in young people staying in the area, motivated by lifetime career options in the local hospitality industry.
- There is a significant increase in students partaking in relevant apprenticeships, courses, training and interventions.
  - There is a significant increase in uptake of opportunities and training in hospitality, positively impacting social mobility.
  - Technology skills improve, enabling businesses to harness efficiencies.
  - Creative solutions are delivered tackling transportation and affordable housing.
- There is a gold standard for “investing in people” adopted by hospitality businesses across the Exmoor and Coast area.
  - There is an upsurge in applicants to relevant courses/training interventions.
  - Businesses report increased employee retention and area employees feel supported to move between hospitality employers.
- There is an increase in the number of hospitality businesses and in income in the sector.
- Average per head visitor spend increases.
- Hospitality is regarded as a career of choice across the Exmoor and Coast area and is seen as the gold standard in hospitality business working together can create opportunity, thrive and support addressing broader area social and economic issues.

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