**Written evidence submitted by the Exeter & Heart of Devon Employment & Skills Board (RUT0172)**

**Infrastructure and skills: How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?**

**Submission from:** Oenone Thomas  
(Partnerships and Projects Manager) on behalf of the Exeter & Heart of Devon Employment & Skills Board

<table>
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<th>Executive Summary of local context:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Few large tourism employers with learning and development programmes</td>
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<td>• Small very rural employers where employees are poorly paid, employed in part-time or seasonal work with limited opportunities for progression</td>
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<td>• Rural sector is not typically staffed as by preferred career more often as a temporary job</td>
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<td>• Transport is a problem for workers as is the cost of local housing</td>
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<th>Executive Summary of recommendations:</th>
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<td>• Make rural tourism an attractive career choice – our workers are ‘our regions’ front of house’</td>
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<td>• Use local larger rural exemplar businesses to introduce and mentor smaller rural tourism business to Higher Performance Working through a collaborative working programme</td>
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<td>• Encourage take-up of co-financed Apprenticeships post May 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities and Difficulties for them to enter and thrive within the Tourism sector</td>
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**Information about the Exeter & Heart of Devon Employment & Skills Board (EHOD ESB)**

EHOD ESB is an Employer-led collaborative partnership of exemplar organisations which works with partners within the public sector and training providers to inform, influence and implement in order to develop a ‘world-class workforce workforce where every individual matters’. EHOD ESB is chaired by Mark Shepherd from Waitrose.

1. Employees within the tourism sector typically face low pay, casual, seasonal and part-time work with poor progression opportunities. As a result, there is a high labour turnover, compounded by the often seasonal nature of the work. This means
that businesses need to spend a disproportionate amount of time and money on recruitment and induction training; resources that could be spent elsewhere in the business.

2. Fewer leading tourism organisations are present in the largely rural and coastal region of the Heart of Devon (HOD)\(^1\), therefore generally speaking employment which invests in learning and development programmes is more limited. This is compounded by competition from Retail, with its kinder working hours, in what is in effect an area of low unemployment. This is possibly further compounded by the uncertainty for non-UK national workers, on whom the tourism sector is heavily dependent following the decision to leave the European Union. Furthermore, unlike some other rural areas, East Devon is in the bottom 25% housing affordability index so there is a growing divide between residents and workers who may expect to take home between £329 and £957 per month (gross).

3. There is a demonstrable need to plug skills gap by making this demand-pull industry more attractive as a career choice and to increase the quality pipeline of staff. We believe that by ensuring there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses, we could indirectly address wider issues predominant within Heart of Devon namely; fuel poverty, higher income support, fewer career opportunities and human capital flight and improve the vitality and resilience of rural communities.

4. The Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board believe that the wider tourism industry needs to be a more attractive career choice, rather than necessity for local people for whom scarce and expensive rural transport make work choices extremely limited or impossible. Young People and older ones with transferable skills would be attracted to local tourism work if it had opportunities for training and progression, an improved status as ‘front of house’ for our region and improved terms and conditions. Small rural tourism businesses could offer these opportunities if they could see that the investment would be self-fulfilling.

5. We have some exemplar and notable tourism businesses who could provide a catalyst to initiate culture changes within smaller companies in the region. This may sound utopian but collaborative working with potential competitors strengthens the whole sector. By inspiring and upskilling managers from rural small tourism businesses (who would in turn filter their teachings through their small teams) we could upskill and retain more skilled staff and drive a culture shift towards Higher Performance Working. The implementation of this culture shift to Higher Performance Working would help to ensure that employees stay within the business for longer, whilst becoming more capable, resulting in better service and improved business profitability and resilience.

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\(^1\) HOD = East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge
6. We also identify opportunities for small tourism rural businesses to use the enhanced 90% co-funding of Apprenticeships from May 2017 as a route to developing skills although access to training provision remains an issue in terms of transportation and cost.

7. Lastly we would like to encourage tourism businesses to offer opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities who are often keen to work but not as well represented as those with physical disabilities. We have exemplar organisations in the South West (Foxes Academy - Minehead, Dame Hannahs, Newton Abbot and Pluss) who could help us ensure that the tourism sector taps this largely untapped talent so that the sector can thrive and seize opportunities as they emerge.

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