

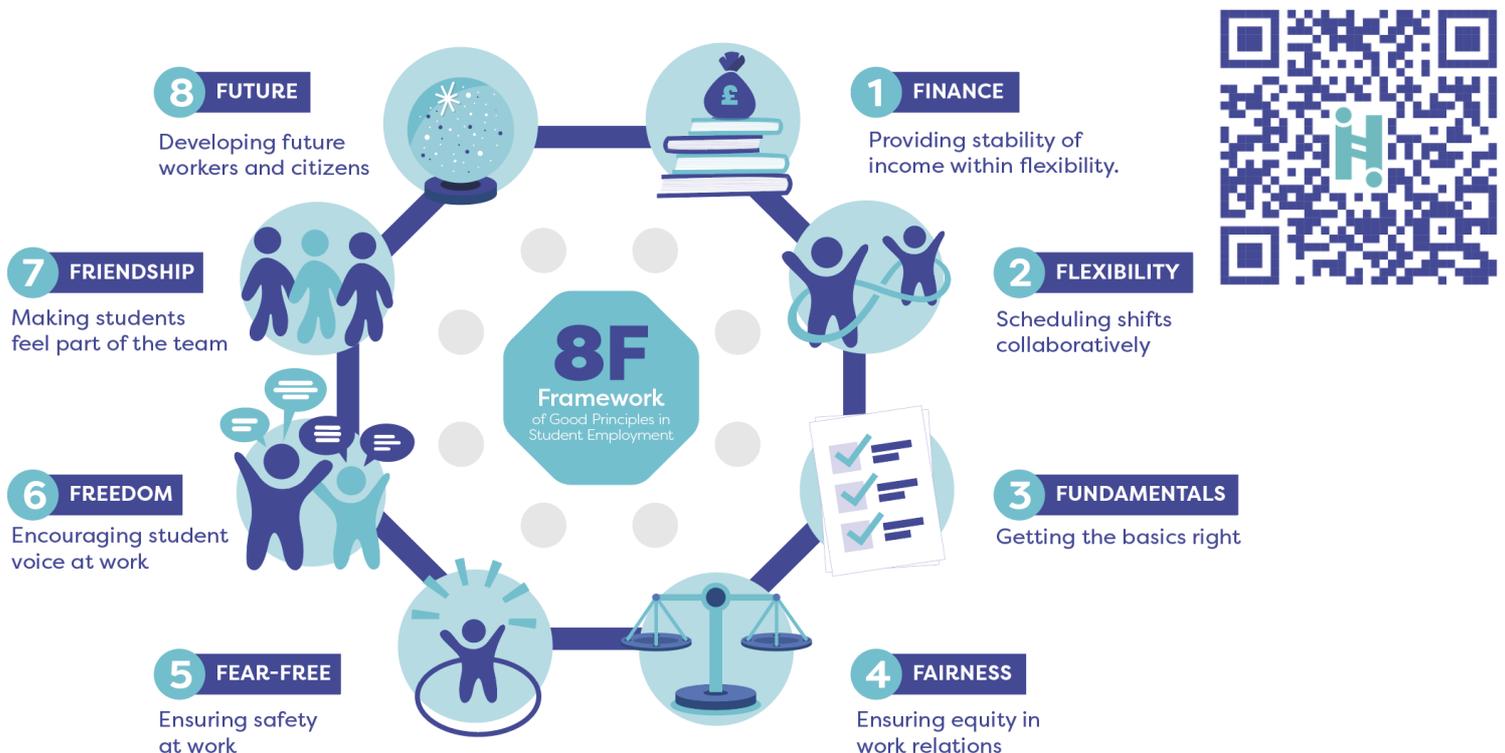
# Transforming the culture of student employment in hospitality

The combination of the need to work, pressurised working environments and the scheduling power zero-hour contracts give to hospitality employers can position young and financially disadvantaged students into vulnerability. Students work in hospitality to earn money and fit work around their schedules but the work they take on can have detrimental impacts on their wellbeing and academic performance. Young students on zero-hour contracts constitute a hitherto unrecognised vulnerable worker group and new policies are required to improve the working lives of students who work.

Drawing on findings from interviews with full-time university students working on zero-hour contracts in the UK hospitality sector, Dr Agnieszka Rydzik (Associate Professor in Tourism and Work, Lincoln International Business School) is working with stakeholders and policymakers to inform change in the culture of student employment in hospitality.

## University of Lincoln research has:

- Identified weak support structures around the protection of student-workers by those with a duty of care towards students and the need for policy responses to acknowledge the distinct needs of this group.
- Identified three areas of student-worker insecurity that are exacerbated by common workplace practices
- Developed a **Framework of Good Principles in Student Employment** based on first-hand accounts of students working in hospitality and provided recommendations for change. The Framework provides guidance on how to make workplaces more inclusive and equitable for student-workers, and to benefit employers through improved staff retention and worker wellbeing.
- Established the **Hospitality Now! Students for Hospitality, Hospitality for Students** initiative to engage key stakeholders and policymakers in transforming the culture of student employment in hospitality.



## Combining full-time study with hospitality work: Key challenges

With students increasingly needing to engage with part-time work to pay for food, rent and utilities, many obtain flexible zero-hour contract work in the hospitality sector as waiters, bar staff, reception, and event staff.

However, the nature of the working arrangements (largely employer-driven rather than worker-centred or achieved through consensus) can result in student-workers experiencing intense job insecurity that can impact on wellbeing and study performance. Research identified three dimensions of student-worker insecurity:

### Inflexibility

The flexibility offered by zero-hour contracts in the sector is largely employer-driven. Students commonly experience being called in to work unexpectedly, receiving repeated requests to work more hours than planned, or being told they are not needed at the last minute – with consequences on their ability to study well and meet financial pressures.

### Replaceability

The impersonal way hospitality employers commonly manage their zero-hour contract workforce and communicate working requirements means that student-workers feel transient, disposable and fear a reduction in hours should they not agree to workplace requests. This can have consequences on their study time, self-confidence and wellbeing.

### Underappreciation

Despite many student-workers having several years of experience in hospitality employment, they report this experience not being valued and feel employers often treat them as temporary inexperienced workers not worth considering for development opportunities or including in work events.



Hospitality  
Now!

## STUDENTS FOR HOSPITALITY, HOSPITALITY FOR STUDENTS

### The case for policy change

Rising cost of living and insufficient state support are resulting in increasing numbers of university students taking on part-time work. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are particularly affected.

There is currently limited support for student-workers on zero-hour contracts from their employers, universities, the students' or trades unions. Policy changes are needed amongst all stakeholder groups to support this vulnerable worker group.

Through increased consultation with student-workers and adopting the [8F Framework of Good Principles in Student Employment](#), employers can improve worker wellbeing, enhance commitment and reduce staff attrition.

Universities and Students' and Trades' Unions could also play a bigger role through supporting student-workers more, better recognising their needs and supporting employers with achieving better practice around zero-hour contracts.



## IMPACT ON POLICY

- This research has identified the challenges student-workers face in hospitality working environments and calls for student-workers to be recognised as a distinct worker group that is supported by policymakers in government as well as those who create policies within the hospitality industry and in the university sector.
- Through the 'Hospitality Now! Students for Hospitality, Hospitality for Students' project, Dr Rydzik seeks to engage with employers, policymakers and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the pressures student-workers face and support stakeholders with developing strategies to help address these challenges.
- The project has launched [the Good Student Employer Charter](#) and developed policy recommendations and guidelines for employers, universities and unions.

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