



## Eurovision 2023

Partnership working for a sustainable  
employment legacy

# Eurovision 2023: Partnership working for a sustainable employment legacy

## Key takeaways

1. Eurovision provides an opportunity to develop a stronger, more sustainable hospitality industry in Liverpool City Region.
2. Liverpool City Region is working closely with partners including Liverpool City Council, the Growth Platform and Jobcentre Plus to ensure local people are able to access the job opportunities provided by Eurovision.
3. As well as being a globally recognised music event, Eurovision offers benefits for Liverpool City Region in rebuilding the hospitality industry and visitor economy, which were hit particularly hard by Covid-19 and its aftershocks.
4. The recent Eurovision Jobs Fair demonstrates the continued importance of face-to-face recruitment, despite the general trend towards online and automated activity in recruitment.
5. Work is now ongoing to ensure an employment legacy for Eurovision, working with partners and employers to improve prospects and conditions across the hospitality industry and visitor economy.

## 1. Context

Liverpool winning the right to host the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest for the UK on behalf of Ukraine represents an unmissable opportunity to put our City Region even more firmly in the global shop window – for investment, music, culture and tourism.

Making sure this is delivered is a key focus for Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), both as a key supporter of the event, and as an organisation with a crucial role in developing and supporting our Visitor Economy.

The successful bid was built on a well-earned and deserved record of delivering major events allied to a musical heritage second to nowhere in the world – foundations not just for the bid, but for the City Region's £5bn visitor economy and hospitality sector. It is a sector, however, that is emerging from a period of significant challenge with a recognition

that Eurovision offers a springboard for recovery and a sustainable future.

Working to fill vacancies in the short term to deliver an incredible experience for Eurovision staff, delegates and visitors is the shared priority – making sure people have a place to stay, somewhere to eat and drink and have a great time the clear direction from leaders.

This is the first step in a longer term aim: delivering a visitor economy and hospitality sector back to full strength, with long term career options and offers, underpinned by good, sustainable jobs. This will help to create a strong and secure future, that reaches right across Liverpool City Region and beyond Eurovision.

The recent backdrop, however, has been one of difficulty and uncertainty. Brexit and COVID-19 have had a major impact on visitor numbers and on recruitment and retention. Sector representatives report high turnover rates and staff moving

across to other sectors such as logistics and warehousing or jobs with a work from home element - a trend that started during furlough and has continued since.

Many left in search of flexibility or more traditional “9-5” style hours. This comes on top of existing perceptions around low pay and lack of flexibility or family friendly hours that have been there for some time – sometimes justified, sometimes not, but nevertheless consequential.

Government interventions to react to the consequences of COVID have had, at best, a mixed reception from the sector. The Kickstart scheme was conceived for an economy very different to the high demand, high vacancy experience of the hospitality industry after the Spring 2020 lockdown. There were some positive stories and experiences, but many employers in the industry remained sceptical of the scheme’s overall effectiveness.

Recruitment and retention of managers and supervisors remains an area of acute challenge for hospitality employers. Schemes aimed at entry level positions, such as Kickstart, were a welcome but imperfect tool compounded by a lack of on the job supervisory capacity to support and train new starters where they were employed.



Restart - part of the government’s Plan for Jobs scheme to support long term unemployed people back to work - continues to operate with a number of

employers engaging and reporting positive outcomes. However, the scale of the vacancy challenge in the sector is beyond the scope of any one centrally designed programme to fix.

Ongoing lockdowns and instability during 2020 and 2021 saw recruitment and retention suffer further, whilst more recently a cost of living crisis is creating insecurity of demand coupled with inflationary challenges for employers and suppliers.

## 2. Approach

When Eurovision was secured for Liverpool in Autumn 2022, there were approximately 3,500 vacancies in the sector in LCR – around 10 times the figure 3 years earlier.

The lead-in time for Eurovision is also shorter than most other major events. Support, ambition and track record are all in our favour. Time isn’t – especially for a sector with existing seasonal contours in staffing demand and supply to be factored in when scaling up recruitment and training.

Whatever the finish point in terms of what would be needed, it was certainly a race, and vacancy numbers meant the sector was beginning it from behind the starting line. It is a challenge however that was swiftly identified. Key partners came together, quickly agreeing that activity must be anchored in long term city-region wide benefits, aimed at supporting the sector to deliver Eurovision, but also linking in to existing planned events such as The Open Golf at Royal Liverpool Golf Club, Aintree Races, and other major events at the Arena.

Linking into the formal delivery structures led by Culture Liverpool and Liverpool City Council, LCRCA and Growth Platform colleagues convened a group of key delivery partners. This began immediately with sector representatives and

operational staff in Jobcentre Plus (JCP), and quickly involved other trusted partners crucial to the task: learning and training providers, trade unions, and local authority representatives across the city region.

Work began with the Growth Platform leading on estimating visitor numbers and any 'Eurovision surge' jobs and roles that might be needed to support them. Best practice was sought from recent comparable events. JCP worked with counterparts who had supported the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022 to identify the importance of quick follow up recruitment activity to harness positive experiences and retain event focused staff and newly developed skills in the sector long term. They also developed a Talent Template for work coaches to highlight customers with experience in sectors that could help to support the event, creating a database of potential employees to target relevant support and training opportunities.

Recognising that in the timeframe available, existing tools, funding streams and interventions were in all likelihood the most effective available, partners shared experiences of what had worked well, and what could be flexed or targeted to a Eurovision based outcome. Honest and constructive input from sector representatives was received on past approaches including Sector Based Work Academies, and how their design and delivery could be improved and aligned more closely to what employers needed.

Sector colleagues also fed in real time experiences and challenges. Some roles in the industry are seeing high turnover rates with others difficult to fill. In part this is underpinning a rise in wages of around 10% in a year, with many roles previously paying the minimum National Living Wage now attracting the Real Living Wage or above.

Challenging as this outlook can be for employers economically, there is a shared recognition from trade unions to businesses that this represents an opportunity to change some negative perceptions of the hospitality sector - to demonstrate that a career in hospitality can be rewarding, with well paid jobs and clear development and training opportunities.

There are also developing models of successful practice. For example, Sefton Hospitality Operations Ltd (SHOL) is supported in its development by Sefton Council with funding from LCRCA and is bucking the trend of high turnover rates and drift to other sectors. This is small scale at present but those involved tell us that good wages and a secure hours model, alongside a clear training offer are resulting in staff being recruited and retained. Scaling up and spreading good practice can be a genuinely positive trend, with Eurovision an excellent opportunity to do so.

The possibility of a City Centre 'One Stop Shop' for recruitment and volunteering support is also being considered, alongside dedicated pop up recruitment activity across the city region. Liverpool is the host and the globally recognised destination, but an event the size of Eurovision needs the infrastructure, input and support of every area in LCR to be a success. By the same token the benefits (both immediate and long term) have the potential to reach every corner of our city region and beyond, and all partners continue to work with a shared aim of ensuring the Eurovision legacy stretches far and wide.

### **3. Eurovision Jobs Fair**

The scale of what is needed required an ambitious approach to match the buzz and anticipation that Eurovision attracts. With this in mind it was agreed that a major in-person set piece recruitment event could

kickstart recruitment and training, bolstered by other activity.

In a further demonstration of the effectiveness of partnership working, LCR Growth Platform colleagues offered a direct link into the Eurovision Song Contest planning and governance structures, and it was agreed to link the recruitment event to a major stakeholder and branding launch event in the ACC Liverpool on 1 March 2023.

The 'same day, same venue' approach joined up high level event management marketing with operational delivery. JCP Merseyside took the lead on delivering and designing the Jobs Fair itself, with Eurovision colleagues offering swift and shared support and permissions around branding use, whilst Culture Liverpool, Liverpool City Council, and other colleagues worked to join up messaging, approach and ambitions to maximise the relevance and reach of the recruitment event. *United by Music* was more than just a strapline as partners came together to deliver at pace and with focus.

This underpinned further the shared narrative of a Eurovision that provides a springboard to a more sustainable hospitality and visitor economy sector as a whole. JCP colleagues encapsulated this aim, titling the event *Eurovision and Beyond* whilst bringing to the fore experience of what worked. Jobs were available on the day, across all sectors of the visitor economy, from retail, to transport to hospitality and accommodation, with a referrals approach to customers that built on the Talent Templates already developed. Importantly it also directly connected 600 members of the Ukrainian Community into Eurovision-related opportunities.

With all political leaders in the city region committed to making this an event for and with our Ukrainian community, the

partnership working provided a further clear pathway to link the week-to-week work and support that JCP staff do alongside Ukrainian refugees and residents with Eurovision itself.

Liverpool Council colleagues and others built on the inclusivity narrative further aligning a "reverse recruitment fair" event. This ran in locality and parallel with the main high profile stakeholder event to give young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) the opportunity to demonstrate to employers what they could offer them.

Hospitality has a growing track record of matching jobs with employees to deliver excellent outcomes for both and the "reverse" approach saw many employers taking the chance to consider the benefits.

Media coverage in advance was significant – again a benefit of joining up operational partnership working with high level delivery. However, perhaps the most telling demonstration of the value of linking recruitment with the official event activity was the palpable sense of expectation and excitement from 50 members of JCP staff as they came together in advance of the event to brief colleagues and employers. Eurovision creates a buzz like no other and it was certainly on show amongst the delivery partners; even those previously unfamiliar with Eurovision's unique attraction and pull would have recognised that something special is coming.

By any metric, the event itself delivered. With over 40 Employers in attendance, dozens of Learning and Training Providers, and over 2,000 jobs on offer there was a real platform for success. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's BeMore and Fair Employment Charter initiatives were also in attendance – demonstrating the importance of Hospitality as a destination career, and an

ambition from partners to highlight and further good employment practice.

Sector buy-in was demonstrated emphatically, with the event formally opened by Head Chef of the Art School restaurant Paul Askew, Chair of Liverpool Hospitality and a high profile figure with a respected track record in directly supporting the hospitality skills and training agenda.

Opportunities included the chance to make mocktails, digital language and translation support from Microsoft, interviews on the day, CV workshops and engagement with JCP staff to link to well matched job roles. Representatives from future local events were present including the Open Golf and Grand National, and there were also major household names from John Lewis to our football clubs.

An estimated 1,500 attended with at least 1,200 engaging with JCP. 63 job offers were made on the day – including a number of people offered their first ever job - and 2,067 second interviews offered. Almost three times as many customers who had been referred from JCP attended than expected and seen recently for other jobs fairs – again demonstrating that the pull of Eurovision offers something beyond an event and two weeks of music.

#### 4. Lessons

Work is ongoing to feed this into a formal and robust economic impact assessment of Eurovision for Liverpool City Region with early figures surpassing expectations. One major well known high street retailer confirmed they had filled all their 100 vacancies, so wouldn't need to be in attendance at the follow up events. A nice problem to have for the JCP staff organising them, but one easily solved with the success of the event encouraging more hospitality employers to engage with the service and the model.

If the aim is 'Eurovision and Beyond' however – then the question of "what next?" is crucial. A second event to retain skills in the sector is planned and there are further events across LCR. Wider lessons beyond Eurovision and hospitality are also being considered.

At a time when online recruitment is becoming ever more popular, and automated techniques or video interviews an increasing feature for job seekers, the recruitment processes here highlight the value of face to face events. Perhaps the development of relationships between recruiters and jobseekers, with the offer of a 'job on the day' isn't as old fashioned as may have been assumed? Certainly, any sector facing critical shortages may look at the numbers through the door, jobs secured and interviews offered and consider whether there are lessons to be learned.



#### 5. Next Steps

Discussions are ongoing with sector representatives as to the event's value as a model for the future. Is a similar set piece recruitment event, without the Eurovision branding but with its lessons and learning likely to become a regular occurrence? Possibly so – potentially quarterly or bi-annually, but early indications are that when partners come together across the private sector, key providers and partners, supported by an enabling public sector, all anchored in

local knowledge and priorities - then impressive results can be achieved.

With the benefit of longer lead in times and a flexible focus there are opportunities to link in schools and careers even more strongly. With every business who exhibited being invited to engage with LCR's Fair Employment Charter, there is scope to use future events to demonstrate and extend good work and good employment practice even further throughout the sector, and Liverpool City Region.

Perhaps most tellingly, relationships have grown and been strengthened during the process which offers value well beyond 13 May 2023 to really make the most of the platform that Eurovision offers. A platform of good jobs, a destination and career of choice and an even stronger more sustainable hospitality and visitor economy sector. By investing in people and skills in a hospitality sector supporting not just Eurovision and other events, but beyond them, we are playing our part in making sure the party continues.

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The Heseltine Institute is marking Liverpool's status as host city for *Eurovision 2023* with this special series of policy briefings. *Eurovision* is the subject of an increasingly rich, diverse field of research, with contributions from fields as diverse as political science, geography, history, cultural studies and social policy. This series explores the impact of *Eurovision* from a range of practitioner and academic perspectives, assessing the economic, social and cultural impacts of the event on Liverpool City Region and beyond.

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