EMPLOYER EXCELLENCE

an initiative from Fáilte Ireland

Employer Excellence Programme

Guidelines

Fáilte Ireland

Eligibility Criteria and Guidelines

The Fáilte Ireland Employer Excellence Programme is open to all tourism businesses who meet the eligibility criteria outlined below. It should be noted however that eligibility does not mean an entitlement to join the Programme, which is at the sole discretion of Fáilte Ireland.

Applicants should read and understand the eligibility criteria before applying for acceptance into the Programme.

PLEASE NOTE: Fáilte Ireland does not appoint an Approved Survey Provider to a business for the Employer Excellence Programme. It is the responsibility of the business to select and appoint an Approved Survey Provider and to pay for their services directly.

THE EXCEPTION to this is micro-businesses – if you are a business with less than 20 employees, please refer to section 'Process for Micro Businesses'.

A Qualifying Applicant must meet the following criteria:

1. Applicants must have a demonstrable tourist experience or product, targeting domestic and/or international visitors. For example, but not limited to, one or more of the following: the ability to provide services through multilingual channels, proactively targeting both the international and domestic markets, alignment with one of Fáilte Ireland's regional brands i.e. Dublin, Ireland's Ancient East, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Wild Atlantic Way.
2. Current employee numbers of over 5 at the time of application and survey (please note that part-time, full-time, and seasonal staff are acceptable as part of this total figure).
3. Must be established and registered for tax, and tax cleared in the Republic of Ireland.
4. If the applicant is an Irish Based Inbound Agent, it must operate as a Republic of Ireland based inbound tour operator, DMC or PCO who package, sell, and market the Republic of Ireland's tourism product overseas.
5. If the applicant is an accommodation provider, they must be Registered or Approved under Fáilte Ireland's National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF).

    a. In order to be eligible, the following businesses must be registered with Fáilte Ireland as Statutory Accommodation Providers:

    - Hotels
    - Guest houses
    - Holiday hostels
    - Youth hostels
    - Caravan and Camping Sites

    b. In order to be eligible, the following businesses must be approved by Fáilte Ireland as Non-Statutory Accommodation Providers:

    - B&Bs
    - Historic Houses
    - Self-Catering (individual properties)
    - Welcome Standard Approved Marinas
    - Welcome Standard Approved Accommodation

    All applicants must be included on the Fáilte Ireland Register of Statutory Accommodation or the Fáilte Ireland Non-Statutory Approved Accommodation Listing (Failte Ireland – Registration and Grading | National Tourism Development Authority). For the purposes of these Guidelines, hereafter both documents together will be referred to as the "NQAF Listings".
6. Public Bodies: Any business that is owned and operated by, or directly funded from, the following public bodies are eligible to apply but must cover the cost of the supports offered through the Employer Excellence Programme:

- Office of Public Works
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Local Authorities/County Councils and their commercial subsidiaries
- National Museum
- Waterways Ireland
- Coillte

Ineligible Applicants

Applicants who meet one or more of the criteria below are ineligible to apply for the Programme:

- Accommodation providers not included on Fáilte Ireland's National Quality Assurance Framework
- Property Marketing Companies/Groups/Organisations
- Businesses that are not specifically targeted toward serving the tourism market in the Republic of Ireland

Guidelines and Business Commitments

The guidelines for application to the Employer Excellence Programme are outlined below as well as an overview of the commitment required of businesses for successful participation in the Programme.

New process: From August 2025, a new enrolment process will be introduced for businesses to access survey providers and the suite of supports provided by Fáilte Ireland through the Employer Excellence Programme (EEP). To ensure the Programme remains viable in the long-term, Fáilte Ireland is establishing a selection of EEP-approved survey providers to give businesses the flexibility to choose a survey provider that best suits their specific needs, with costs covered directly by the businesses themselves. As a result, Fáilte Ireland will no longer subsidise employee engagement surveys directly or contract survey providers on behalf of the businesses. The broader suite of supports and interventions for participating businesses available through the Employer Excellence Programme such as people management training, one-on-one guidance from a HR expert for each business, certification, PR and marketing will continue to be provided by Fáilte Ireland (subject to legal requirements and Government approval). This will ensure that businesses retain a structured framework to drive ongoing employee engagement and workforce development as part of the wider Programme, while having greater choice in the survey issued to employees.

All applicants should note that the business is committing to taking part in the Employer Excellence Programme for at least two years, using an approved survey provider to complete an annual employee engagement survey for certification and award consideration. The business should actively implement all aspects of the Programme, including surveys, action planning, and training, while dedicating the necessary time and resources required. The business is also expected to work towards continuous improvement in employee engagement and development, using the broad range of supports available from Fáilte Ireland. Promotion of the Programme should be visible across all business communications, with Fáilte Ireland clearly acknowledged as the lead partner.

Guidelines:

1. All applicants must have a profile on Fáilte Ireland's 'Trade Portal' which is accessible on www.failteireland.ie. If you do not already have an account, you will be required to create one.
2. Applicants should note that granting access to the Trade Portal or application form does not confirm final eligibility of an Applicant. Depending on the information provided in the application form, an Applicant may still be deemed ineligible for participation in the Programme later in the process.
3. Through the Fáilte Ireland Trade Portal, applicants may be asked to provide or confirm details such as their business name and information, including current employee numbers.
4. Applicants will be asked to confirm their acceptance of the business commitments to the Programme, relating to the provision of adequate staffing, time dedicated both toward learning as

well as towards ongoing implementation, and financial resources to complete the Programme. It is advised that full engagement with the Programme will require two days per month by the business for the duration of the programme. This is based on each people manager taking a half day per week for training and to manage employee engagement, action planning and implementation, gathering of data and reporting. Further information is detailed below.

5. Successful Applicants must directly engage and pay for the services of a Fáilte Ireland Approved Employer Excellence Survey Provider (unless they are a micro business with less than 20 employees – please refer to section 'Process for Micro Businesses'). Fáilte Ireland will subvent the programme of wider supports and interventions offered through the Employer Excellence Programme including the 121 clinics with HR experts, capability building supports, and access to Management Training and other learnig Failte Ireland content, subject to legislative requirements and approval. Following completion of the employee survey and based on the results of that survey, businesses will be supported in developing their own bespoke action plan for employee engagement. The resulting Action Plan will outline development areas for the employer to focus on to enhance and improve their people practices. This plan will be completely confidential to the business and will identify the specific workstreams through which they will progress toward employer excellence. The entire Programme will be further supported by Fáilte Ireland through a comprehensive suite of additional supports for businesses including:
    - Build Industry Capabilities – Assistance in enhancing employer brand, employee engagement and building a positive workplace culture to fully leverage the benefits of their Employer Excellence journey. This support will be delivered through a range of resources, including online learning tools, webinars, workshops, certification programmes, and industry awards.
    - Boost Operational Efficiencies – Guidance on optimising employee potential to improve operational performance. This will include access to online learning platforms, targeted training sessions, practical toolkits, and webinars.

    Depending on business/organisational needs, applicants may be able to avail of further supports in the Employer Excellence Programme. They will be advised of any further opportunities as they progress through the programme.
6. Applicants accept that their overall employee engagement survey score will be shared with Fáilte Ireland on an annual basis by the selected survey provider. This will be used to determine certification level and will not be shared publicly.
7. Applicants, once accepted on the programme, will be certified annually based on their Employee Engagement Survey results and will be issued with an Employer Excellence certificate, plaque and online promotional materials, and will be eligible for consideration for Fáilte Ireland's annual Employer Excellence Awards.
8. Applicants must be able to demonstrate their commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across all areas of their business including, but not limited to, the following areas:
    - Employees
    - Customers
    - Marketing
    - Procurement

For further details please contact us at **employerexcellence@failteireland.ie**

Business Commitments:

1. Commit to the Programme for a minimum of two years from the date of this agreement.
2. Select a survey provider from the list of Employer Excellence Programme approved survey providers and pay the survey provider directly for the provision of the employee engagement survey (unless they are a micro business with less than 20 employees – please refer to section 'Process for Micro Businesses').
3. Complete the survey by 30 November annually to be considered for an award and to be certified each year by Failte Ireland.

4. Grant permission to the survey provider to provide Fáilte Ireland with a report outlining overall score, the topline score across the five key themes of Failte Ireland's assessment criteria, number of employees surveyed and the date of survey completion.
5. This must be shared with Fáilte Ireland by 31 December each year so that Fáilte Ireland can certify the Business for the following year.
6. Undertake at least one HR clinic following completion of employee engagement survey, with the first one to be scheduled by Fáilte Ireland within 2–3 weeks of survey scores being shared by survey provider with Failte Ireland.
7. Proactively champion and implement all elements of the Programme within the Business, including the Employee Survey, Insights Analysis, Action Planning and People Development, and People Management Training to promote buy-in, support and positive engagement.
8. Allocate all required time and people resources to successfully execute the Programme in the Business on an annual basis.
9. Maintain a culture of continuous improvement in employment practices and employee engagement whilst engaged in the Programme and commit to sustaining this beyond the lifetime of the Programme.
10. Foster a culture of people development within the Business, seeking and introducing opportunities to upskill people managers through enterprise supports provided by Fáilte Ireland through online learning, mentoring and guidance.
11. Using the Employer Excellence branded materials to promote the Programme through all appropriate business communication channels and recruitment campaigns, always leading with Fáilte Ireland as the key partner of the Programme (i.e., on social media, on and offline job advertisements, digital marketing, face-to-face presentations, recruitment activities, etc.)
12. If the business is new to the Employer Excellence Programme, applicants are required to enrol their line managers, people managers and supervisors to undertake the Fundamentals of People & Performance Management in the first year of the Programme. It is required that 70% of those enrolled successfully complete the training in the first year. Businesses who have already completed the first phase of the Employer Excellence Programme will not be required to retake this aspect of the Programme. Refresher training will be required five years after The Fundamentals of People & Performance Management was first completed.

    The Fundamentals of People and Performance Management is an online learning programme comprising 3 modules, with an expected total learning time of approximately 6 hours. To maximise the benefit of the learnings from each module, it is recommended that the modules are completed separately, allowing time between each module to apply learning in the workplace. The modules are:

    1) **Effective Communications for Employee Engagement:** 3 sections, total 105 minutes.
    2) **Personal Leadership – Coaching & Management Styles in Building of Effective Teams:** 3 sections, total 105 minutes.
    3) **Managing Performance Day-to-Day:** 4 sections, total 135 minutes.

    Because of the flexible online format, learners can engage with the content at their own convenience and pace, with a focus on applying the learning in real time throughout.
13. Support Fáilte Ireland in profiling the tourism sector as a quality workplace, and agree to providing at least one of the following:
    a) Provide Fáilte Ireland with employee retention data to enable Failte Ireland to track the progress of the Programme.
    b) Provide Fáilte Ireland with other metrics that demonstrate the impact the Programme is having on operational efficiencies, cost saving and customer service.
    c) Case studies/profiles for Fáilte Ireland campaigns and PR to positively position the Programme and the sector as a place to work.
14. The Business may also be asked to complete an impact assessment of the Programme on their business to support Fáilte Ireland in demonstrating the impact its investment in the Programme is having on overall tourism business performance.

15. Businesses are asked to commit to participating in Fáilte Ireland's Business Survey which takes place annually. This allows Fáilte Ireland to gather accurate and robust data relating to employee numbers and other key indicators for the Applicant's business/organisation, to support our ongoing development of the Tourism sector. By participating in the Employer Excellence Programme, the Business is agreeing, if approved for participation, to provide employer performance and engagement data to Fáilte Ireland for a period of up to 10 years from the acceptance onto the Programme and that the applicant will work with Fáilte Ireland to ensure this data is reported in a timely manner. Only fully anonymised l data will be collected to comply with GDPR requirements. It may also be used to support interventions identified as part of an audit of participating businesses' employer brand, and could deliver outcomes such as:
    - Enabling employers to enhance their employer brand
    - Showcasing people in their workplace and celebrating their achievements with the business and employee's permission
    - Promoting tourism as a career
    - Highlighting initiatives relating to staff retention and hiring, including diversity, equality and inclusion
16. A business will be considered to have exited the programme if:
    - They terminate their contract with their survey provider and do not replace them with another approved provider. To remain in the programme, a business must have an active contract with an approved survey provider.
    - The business opts to leave the Employer Excellence Programme. Though this decision does not affect their contract with the survey provider, it will impact the eligibility of the business for future Failte Ireland supports.

Process for Micro Businesses (Less than 20 Employees):

There is currently a mechanism in place to provide employee engagement surveys to micro businesses (less than 20 employees) with a contracted provider in place until June 2027. Therefore, any micro business looking to join the Employer Excellence Programme will come under the contracted provider for this cohort:

- If a business looks to join in 2025, they will complete their two-year programme with this provider.
- If a business applies to join in 2026 the business can complete one year with the provider and then they will select a supplier from the approved selection and will be treated in the same way as all other business from 2027.

For technical assistance: email **customersupport@failteireland.ie**

For specific queries in relation to the Employer Excellence Programme: email employerexcellence@failteireland.ie

EMPLOYER EXCELLENCE
RECOGNISED 2024
an initiative by Fáilte Ireland

Employer Excellence Programme

Approval of Survey Providers

Recognition of Prior Learning

Fáilte Ireland

Employer Excellence Programme

- Approval of Survey Providers
- Recognition of Prior Learning

This framework is designed to provide guidance for businesses that do not qualify for the Employer Excellence Programme due to their use of a non-approved employee engagement survey provider, or where their management team has completed management development training elsewhere and they do not wish to complete the Fundamentals of People and Performance Management training. Our commitment is to support the growth and excellence of Ireland's tourism industry by promoting high standards in people management and employee engagement. Through this initiative, we aim to foster exceptional workplaces across the sector.

Approval of Survey Providers

An initial assessment framework was developed in 2023 to enable Fáilte Ireland to award the Employer Excellence Mark (Employer Excellence Recognised) to businesses who are involved with another Employee Engagement Process e.g. a separate Employee Survey and/or People Management Learning Programme, upon successful assessment by an independent expert. To support the next phase of the Employer Excellence Programme (EEP), the original assessment framework has been updated by an independent service provider to ensure a rigorous, fair and transparent process for assessing survey providers to become an approved Employer Excellence Programme survey provider.

A fundamental aspect of the Employer Excellence Programme's certification model is ensuring that businesses, regardless of their survey provider, are assessed consistently. To achieve this, all surveys must cover the five key themes set out in the framework and provide evidence of employee feedback on at least one sub-theme with each of these core areas. Any survey provider who applies to become approved for this programme will be required to show that their services meet the required standards.

If your business is currently using a survey provider who is not approved and you wish to join the Employer Excellence Programme, you should refer your survey provider to Fáilte Ireland (contact employerexcellence@failteireland.ie) for further information. Fáilte Ireland has engaged an independent service provider to implement a transparent and robust assessment framework, ensuring that only methodologically sound and industry-aligned providers are selected for inclusion. Applications from new providers are accepted periodically. If a survey provider applies and is approved by Fáilte Ireland, a tourism business who uses that survey provider will have the option of applying to join the Employer Excellence Programme.

The list of Approved Employer Excellence Programme Survey Providers is available here.

Recognition of Prior Management Training

An assessment framework has been developed to enable Fáilte Ireland to recognise an employer whose team has previously completed a Management Learning Programme elsewhere once that that training has been successfully assessed by an independent expert. By having their chosen management training formally recognised, a business can join the programme once they meet all the criteria outlined in this document without needing to undertake the Fundamentals of People Management Training.

Assessment Themes:

Businesses must provide evidence of management training in all topics highlighted under the four core themes below.

If a business believes their training meets all of the necessary topics, they will be required to provide evidence that individual managers have received training, and that a minimum of 70% of the management/supervisory team have completed the training in each topic within the framework.

Application Process

The process to apply to have alternate people management learning assessed is outlined below.

Step 1

Notify the team in Fáilte Ireland that your business wishes to be considered for the mark

Step 3

Acknowledgment will be sent by Fáilte Ireland on receipt of the application

Step 5

Notification of whether the application is successful will be awarded within approx. 3 weeks on receipt of the application

Step 2

Complete the application form and provide all necessary requirements and documentation

Step 4

The application will be assessed independently against the Framework

Depending on the outcome of their assessment, a business will have options open to them in terms of proceeding to join the Employer Excellence Programme. A member of the Fáilte Ireland team will engage directly with the business at that stage to outline the options and any associated costs.

Costs

There is a fee charged to have an alternate training programme assessed. This fee is invoiced to the business by Fáilte Ireland and is non-refundable, regardless of the outcome of the assessment.

Further information

For further information, contact us at **employerexcellence@failteireland.ie**