



Retailers innovate to attract and retain staff

Retailers are innovating and using non-monetary work perks in a bid to incentivise and hold onto their staff, as **Edmund Burke** reports

Paths to employment

Starter salaries in grocery retail sector are up 15% on average over the last two years, according to one recent survey of the sector.

The Excel Recruitment's latest Grocery Retail Salary Guide 2024 has unearthed a number of interesting new trends in a survey of grocery retailers, who have had to innovate in a bid to attract and retain staff. The sector is having to compete with mounting competition for retail staff, notably among highly-sought skills areas such as butchers and bakers.

With rental accommodation and shorter working weeks on the table, the growing demand for food-to-go in Ireland has helped to bolster the fortunes of those working in forecourt delis, with forecourt deli managers now earning as much as €5,000 more than last year while forecourt trainee managers have witnessed salary increases of approximately €2,000.

The latest Grocery Retail Salary Guide 2024 from

Excel, which tracks salaries and trends across the grocery retail sector, has shown overall salaries for entry-level roles in grocery retail have gone up by 15% over the last 24 months — largely due to increases in the minimum wage, according to the guide.

The research by Excel Recruitment suggests that the 21% increase in the national minimum wage over the last two years has skewed salaries in the sector, often increasing the wages of lower-paid workers, whereas those of more experienced staff in certain roles have remained stagnant or even seen some reductions.

In addition, it has

prompted many grocery retailers to 'think outside the box' in order to attract and retain talent, with reduced working hours increasingly on the table as employers explore non-monetary work perks. The recruitment experts report that some of the larger retailers have even looked at rental residential

accommodation investment as a way to attract a much-needed workforce.

Nikki Murran, director of grocery retail with Excel Recruitment, said: "We have noticed that in 2023, employees with less experience have felt a bump in pay. We believe that much of this development is due to the increase in the national minimum wage in January 2023 as this has had a knock-on effect across the board for junior-level management, trainee, and fresh food roles in the grocery sector."

"This has sometimes led to cases where junior managers are only being paid slightly more than the teams they are managing. With the national minimum wage increasing to €12.70 an hour from January 1st, 2024, we expect this trend to continue into 2024 and beyond."

"Increased demand for food-to-go in Ireland has also pushed up wage rates here. Since Covid restrictions were fully lifted, more people are commuting and travelling and this has been a boon to many forecourt retailers, particularly those based along major thoroughfares or motorways. Demand for deli managers is therefore high and this in turn is fueling wage growth for those roles."

Survey respondents also said that they've adopted

new ways of incentivising staff, rewarding them through means other than salaries alone. Some respondents cited pressures including minimum wage and insurance costs as prompting employers to 'think outside the box' around employment packages and perks.

Nikki Murran said: "The last couple of years have seen a special focus on work-life balance and working hours. Many big retailers have reduced their working hours from 48 or 45 weekly hours to 39, with 40 hours fast becoming the new industry norm."

"Small benefits such as vouchers, 'birthday days', and discounts are becoming more important to candidates when accepting job offers, causing retailers to think creatively around their entire package on offer. A number of retailers are also expanding their portfolio into the rental market in order to secure accommodation for candidates coming from overseas, or indeed relocating throughout Ireland."

Highlights from the Excel Recruitment's latest Grocery Retail Salary Guide include:

A forecourt deli manager with one year's experience can expect to earn €35,000 in 2024 — 16% higher than the €30,000 earned last year.

A fresh food manager with ten or more years' experience can now expect to earn €48,000 if working in a large supermarket — up from €45,000 last year.

Butchers and in particular bakers have often seen wage increases of between 5% and 10% over the last year. For example, in a large supermarket, a baker manager

with one year's experience for example can now expect a salary of €40,000 — up from €38,000 last year, while a baker with a similar amount of experience can now expect to be paid €15 an hour — up from €13.50 last year.

A deli manager in a large supermarket can now expect to earn €37,000 if they have one year's experience — up from €33,000 in 2023.

Many store managers of

small supermarkets have seen a fall in their pay over the last year, regardless of their experience. For example, such a store manager can expect to earn €40,000 this year if they have one year's experience — down from €45,000 last year.

Nikki Murran added: "The demand for candidates with fresh food experience continues to be high — with deli managers being particularly sought after across the board. Many retailers are opting to fill these deli roles with trained chefs who are looking for more palatable

hours. Bakers and butchers are still highly sought after but the market here has slightly levelled out, with more candidates available now than at any other time over the last 18 months."

"Much like last year, 2024 looks set to be a challenging but exciting time for the Irish grocery retail market. Despite real challenges stemming from the national minimum wage, the cost of an additional Bank Holiday, enforced sick pay, and a near-perfect level of unemployment, retailers remain as passionate and as energetic about the industry as ever."

Fashion salaries rising

Meanwhile, the Excel survey also found that fashion and other non-food retailers in Ireland have been ramping up salaries by 10-12% during 2023 in a bid to retain staff.

Some roles in the sector could see a sizeable boost of up to €6,000 in their salary in the coming months.

Several key trends during the past year are likely to continue into 2024:

Reduced Working Hours: Non-food and fashion retail sectors are reverting to a standard 37.5 to 40-hour working week, reflecting a commitment to promoting work-life balance.

Flexible Weekend Rotations: Saturday and Sunday schedules are now commonly rotated, with a 2-in-4 schedule being the most popular, providing employees with flexibility and time for personal activities.

Increased Holidays:

Companies are offering more vacation days, with the average ranging from 22 to 23 days. Some progressive companies are even extending this to 25 days, recognising the importance of downtime for employee well-being.

Aislinn Lea, director of non-food and fashion retail with Excel, said: "The high cost of living has made it imperative for businesses to offer competitive financial packages. Smaller enterprises, in particular, face the challenge of managing these added costs in contrast to their larger counterparts that have more resources at their disposal. To stay competitive, smaller businesses are enhancing junior role salaries by up to 10-12%."

A team leader/supervisor in 2023 who might have been earning between €23k and €24k, could expect to earn between €28k and €30k moving into 2024. Furthermore, a team leader/supervisor in a large sports retail store who received a salary of between €32k to €36k in 2023 could earn up to €39k in the year ahead.

An assistant manager working in a high-street fashion retail outlet had the earning potential of between €32k and €35k in the past twelve months and now has the opportunity to earn up to between €36k and €40k, marking a noteworthy 13% salary increase.

"It's the smaller retailers who are struggling the most in attracting and retaining junior talent such as sales assistants, supervisors, and managers," said Aislinn Lea. "To address this issue, employers need to educate potential candidates about the avenues for growth and career development within both the company and the broader industry."



Nikki Murrán, director of grocery retail with Excel Recruitment.



Retailers are finding it particularly difficult to attract and retain skilled workers such as butchers and bakers, but they are 'thinking outside the box' with days off and other perks.