



Hotels urged to gear up for new challenges

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THE hotel sector in Northern Ireland has been warned that it faces new challenges if it wants to maintain strong growth levels.

Michael Williamson, director of hotel, leisure and tourism consultants ASM Horwath, said competition was set to intensify.

He told a conference at the Hilton Hotel in Belfast that growth had been strong since 1995, with new records being set for room occupancy in 2006, the last full year for which full data is available.

He said the profit margin for hotels in Northern Ireland was now almost on a par with those in Dublin.

Mr Williamson said: "Our research shows that between 2003 and 2006, the profit per room increased by 69%.

"In addition, the profit per available room is above the 'all Ireland' average and is close to the performance of Dublin hotels."

Mr Williamson said there was still a reliance on business tourism and that hotel design was largely traditional.

"In order to compete, hotel owners need to offer the same comforts that people enjoy at home such as wireless internet access, adjustable lighting, standalone showers and separate tubs as well as memorable and unique design concepts," he added.

Janice Gault, CEO of the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, said: "The hotel market is in a strong position to grow further but it is only through design that we can offer something different to experienced travellers who demand more than just a bed for the night, whether they are staying in five star luxury or somewhere less opulent."

Sue Wheldon of architects and project managers Douglas Wallace, which organised the event in conjunction with the federation, said the hotel market was well positioned to exploit the contribution of design to improve profitability and attract consumers who value well designed hotels.

She said her firm's experience with projects such as the Morrison Hotel in Dublin and the g Hotel in Galway were examples where new concepts had been explored.



Studying the findings of a report on trends in the hotel sector in Northern Ireland are (from left) Janice Gault, CEO of the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, Sue Wheldon, director of Douglas Wallace, and Michael Williamson from ASM Horwath. The report was launched at a seminar which was organised by architects Douglas Wallace in conjunction with the hotels federation