

# Apprenticeships on the up

Apprenticeships remain central to delivering employment solutions for the sector. **Martin-Christian Kent** reports

**T**he sector has traditionally had strong apprenticeships, which have provided apprentices with an opportunity to develop a broad range of skills and knowledge whilst in employment. After a period when the schemes became watered down through a series of government initiatives, the last few years have seen them begin to return to their former glory – combining a robust framework whilst at the same time being flexible to meet individual business needs.

There are currently 18,000 apprentices across the sector and research undertaken by Populus Business Case Research in 2008 found that 80 percent of businesses employing apprentices reported that it made them more competitive, the same percentage also found it reduced staff turnover.

This is confirmed by Simon Coombe, proprietor of the Three Ways House Hotel in the Cotswolds: “We have a very settled kitchen team, so it has made a big difference in terms of recruitment costs. The chefs as a whole appreciate what apprentices contribute; it helps keep the whole team together. A number of our chefs have been with us for ten years”.

Evidence also shows that it can help recruitment. 65 percent believe that offering apprenticeships can help them fill vacancies more quickly, while 77 percent find it more cost-effective than hiring skilled staff.

A factor behind their continuing success is that their delivery is becoming more flexible, with employers taking advantage of greater versatility in the way they are being accessed. This has seen larger employers embedding the apprenticeship within their in-house training, so that effectively the apprenticeship underpins and strengthens in-house training, rather than sitting outside of it. Greater online delivery of training and assessment has allowed apprentices to progress on their apprenticeship regardless of the time of day or location.

Smaller businesses are not only benefiting from these online tools, but also from group training associations



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**"THE CHEFS AS A WHOLE APPRECIATE WHAT APPRENTICES CONTRIBUTE; IT HELPS KEEP THE WHOLE TEAM TOGETHER"**

which facilitate apprenticeships being delivered across a number of different employers with most of the organisation (and paperwork) being managed centrally by a work-based learning provider or college. This new way of working and the harnessing of new technology makes the apprenticeship more accessible for a greater number of employers.

People 1st's latest research – State of the Nation 2010 – shows that the sector's skills gaps and shortage increasing. A quarter of sector businesses believe that their staff lack the skills required in their business. These skills are most acute for chefs and managers. The apprenticeship provides a perfect vehicle to tackle those skills needs

head on.

Apprenticeship frameworks are made up of a competency qualification (usually a National or Scottish Vocational Qualification) and a knowledge based qualification called a technical certificate. Owing to different education policies in each nation, the frameworks vary slightly. In England and Wales, for example, the framework currently includes key skills (such as 'communication' and 'application of number'), whereas in Scotland they have 'core skills' and in Northern Ireland, 'essential skills.' Despite the difference, they in essence, aim to address the same sort of skills.

Across the sector, apprenticeship frameworks are available in Hospitality and Catering, Travel and Tourism Services: Leisure and Business (known as Travel Services from September 2010) and Drinks Dispense Systems (available from October 2010 in England and Wales).

A new hospitality and catering framework is to be introduced by People 1st from 1 August 2010, which will see new routes for Thai, Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi cuisine in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, as well as for 'kitchen services' aimed at those cooking large volumes of food to brand standards, but require limited culinary expertise. These will sit alongside existing routes for chefs, food and beverage service, housekeeping, front office and multi-skilling.

The coalition government has reinforced its commitment to apprenticeships. It is a central plank of both parties and amidst the announcement of £6.2 billion cuts in government spending, funding was diverted to increase the number of apprenticeship places made available for small and medium sized businesses in England.

Apprenticeships provide a tremendous opportunity for the sector to provide structured training to address its skills needs and the latest government announcements provide fresh impetus for sector businesses to take advantage of them. ●