

Christina Benjamin, Compass Academy Apprentice



Christina Benjamin is now in the second year of her Compass Academy Apprenticeship with Compass Group UK & Ireland.. People 1st caught up with her to see how the experience has changed her over the past year...

Christina spent the first year of her Apprenticeship gaining experience in Compass' conference and banqueting department, in the kitchen and in the office at an event, conference and exhibition venue in London. Now, at just 19, she has moved into the role of assistant restaurant manager for the catering at the headquarters of an entertainment and communications company in Osterley.

When asked what she has learnt in the second year of the programme so far, she says: "It's been a big leap since my first year. I was just getting to know the business then – now I'm managing employees on a day-to-day basis, and making the team aware of areas where we can improve.

"I've been lucky enough to have two very different experiences: I'm catering for employees now, whereas before I was catering for customers that were visiting exhibitions and events. The clients are totally different, which means that the food and beverage offer is different too."

Compass only recently gained the business and industry contract in Osterley, so Christina is helping to implement new ideas and methods to the current workforce. She says that her Apprenticeship has really allowed her to gain an in-depth knowledge of how that Compass works as a company, and she is enthusiastic about communicating "the Compass way" to her catering team.

She has also been appointed "energy champion" for her site. This involves attending monthly meetings to learn about the forthcoming month's food and drink promotions, new food offerings and any company-wide campaigns. It is then Christina's responsibility to implement these new offers back at her site.

When asked to name one of the highlights of her Apprenticeship, Christina describes the "off the job" modules, which include profit protection and customer care courses, as being really valuable. She says they have boosted her knowledge, and she enjoys passing this on to her team.

She also takes motivation from the practical experience that she is gaining: "I enjoy the buzz of making sure my customers are happy, making sure my team is happy and making sure we are hitting the targets that we need to."

Christina feels that her Apprenticeship has really opened her eyes to the opportunities within the hospitality industry. When People 1st last met with her, she planned to become an events manager, but she is now leaning more towards the business side of hospitality.

"When I was working at the conference and exhibition venue, I could work seven days a week and lot of hours, which I enjoyed and which was really rewarding, but sometimes I found it tiring. I'm now leaning more towards the executive dining side of the business; in hospitality within the business and industry sector, I can still be involved with functions, but on a smaller scale."

She feels that the Apprenticeship has prepared her for the realities of work, something she would not have gained from an academic degree: "If I hadn't done the Apprenticeship, I probably would

have gone to university and done events management. I would still be there now, learning about it, but wouldn't have any idea of what it was really like out in the big wide world.

"Instead of spending three years at university, I've been able to say "I don't think this isn't for me", and have been able to work within the same industry as I would have done, gaining valuable on-the-job experience."

When asked if she would still recommend the Apprenticeship experience to others, Christina says: "Yes, definitely; it's allowed me to experience different things and learn where I want to take my career."