Great Expectations: Successful Work Experiences in Hospitality

Introduction

The hospitality industry enjoys greater stability than many industries in the UK. One in every twelve jobs in the UK is in the hospitality or tourism sector - or 2.6m people - and the hospitality workforce is projected to grow by 6% in the longer term, which is higher than the projected increase for the economy as a whole. In addition, according to VisitBritain’s Delivering a Golden Legacy, Britain aims to attract 40 million visitors a year and earn £31.5 billion from international tourism annually by 2020. All that tourism will require up to 200,000 new jobs.

Global opportunities abound

Globally, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasts that travel and tourism will account for “10% of global GDP, $10.5 trillion US dollars and 1 in 10 jobs by 2023. Over 70 million jobs could be added in the next decade with two-thirds of the jobs in Asia.”

In the UK, the industry’s sector skills council, People 1st, states the UK’s hospitality industry “employs people in more than 419,000 establishments.” Some of the sectors include:

- Pubs, bars and nightclubs
- Restaurants
- Self-catering accommodation
- Tourist services
- Travel services
- Visitor attractions

These sectors illustrate the abundance and variety of global roles to suit entrants to the industry. However, the optimistic numbers and projections are only one side of the coin. Statistics confirm that the industry can struggle to attract and retain skilled employees. For example:

- In the UK in 2011, 16% of hospitality and tourism employers had a vacancy, which is higher than the UK economy as a whole (12%). Vacancies were most commonly reported in hotels, restaurants, pubs, bars and nightclubs.
- 21% of the UK’s hospitality and tourism employers report skills gaps compared to only 13% in the overall economy. Skills gaps are reported at all levels, however, employers report high levels of skills gaps among - surprisingly - management occupations.
- The sector is predominately made up of small businesses; almost half (46%) employ fewer than five people while only 1% of businesses employ more than 100 people.

Source: State of the Nation. (2013) People1st

How can employers – particularly the small and medium enterprises - improve the retention of new recruits from Further and Higher education and prevent disillusionment with the industry? How do new recruits obtain a realistic outlook of what employment entails and learn the skills needed to fill the ‘skills gaps’ in hospitality workplaces?
Work experience

Work experience programmes may be the answer. Anne Pierce MBE FIH, Chief Executive of The Springboard Charity, explains why work experience matters: “Our research shows that work experience remains the single most important factor influencing career choice. However, not all work experience is good. The industry needs to offer more and better quality work experience opportunities to convert this potential.”

Tim West FIH, Chairman of Lexington, a 600-employee contract caterer says his firm aims to provide effective placements to:

- give future hospitality managers an authentic and positive impression of the industry
- enable both students and employers to better understand future employment opportunities and what makes individuals ‘employable’
- underpin a positive relationship between education and industry
- stimulate and reward those directly contributing to the trainees’ experience

Managing Director of the Red Carnation Hotels Collection, Jonathan Raggett FIH, confirms "Work experience can provide a great introduction to hospitality, but it is vital that managers take an interest and spend time with the student, as this personal involvement is likely to excite them and keep them interested in a career in the industry. Equally important is the opportunity for staff to share their knowledge and experience, in addition to introducing the business to potential future employees."

Finding the right trainees

And what makes a good candidate for work experience or employment? In their seminal title on hospitality personnel management, University of Brighton academics Mike Boella FIH and Steven Goss-Turner FIH are frank in their assertion that attitude is the key trait when selecting and training staff in hospitality workplaces. They state "It is better to aim to select people with the attitudes you want rather than to attempt to ‘instil’ attitudes into unwilling employees. If, for example, a person resents serving others, it is unlikely that you will have the time and psychological expertise to change his attitudes. It is much better to avoid recruiting him in the first place.”*

The selection process used by the Red Carnation Hotels’ Human Resources team reinforces the importance of attitude and the team actively seek people who have a high ‘HQ’ (hospitality quotient). Once a work placement begins at the hotels, the appropriate Head of Department is responsible for overseeing the programme. Jonathan Raggett adds, “The structure of the programme is such that it will cover the key duties and responsibilities of a role/department, but the individuals who ask questions and show an increased enthusiasm to learn are most likely to get the greatest benefit from the experience.”

Academics can play a key role in determining the motivation of their hospitality students prior to work placement participation by taking into account the students’ strengths and weaknesses and helping them to focus on finding the right fit within the industry. The University of Brighton’s programme is an excellent example. In anticipation of their important 3rd year work placements, Brighton’s 2nd year students attend weekly classes on CV writing and interview skills as well as meeting industry employers and much more.

“*It is essential that students of hospitality management have the opportunity to develop the skills of academic practice, such as analytical thinking, critical appraisal and informed judgment within the operational context of the industry. The University of Brighton strongly promotes and supports the work placement provision within its degree courses, enabling students to secure an appropriate role within a sector of hospitality and ensuring that both academic and experiential outcomes are valuable to each individual, so that they have the potential to contribute successfully to the future of the industry.”

Dr Steven Goss-Turner FIH, University of Brighton

Types of experience

The UK’s National Council for Work Experience lists eight different types of work experience students can obtain ranging from ‘internships’ to ‘sandwich placements’.

Work experience is generally for a fixed period of time and contributes to the student’s overall career development and aspirations. In many instances, work experience results in course credit when the student is participating in Further or Higher Education. Work experience does not require the employer to hire the trainee at the end of the training period nor is it normally intended as training for a particular position in the organisation.

Work experience should provide students with:

- an understanding of the work environment and job responsibilities
- specific hospitality work skills and experience
- feedback on how the student performs in the hospitality work setting

Work placements may be a compulsory component to a further or higher education course, which has been contractually agreed between the employer, the student and the educational provider. Matters regarding pay and the National Minimum Wage (NMW) may not apply when students are undertaking work placements of up to one year as part of a UK-based higher education course of study. However, if an intern or work placement is classed as a worker, then they’re normally due the NMW.

There has been a recent backlash in the UK against unpaid internships and some businesses have been ordered to pay salary to previously unpaid interns. To determine whether the NMW applies when offering work experience, UK employers should visit the government’s site on Employing People at www.gov.uk and check with the student’s institution.

Establishing a work experience plan

To create a constructive work experience – whether it occurs in a small pub or an international hotel chain – there needs to be structure and documentation. Most universities, colleges or schools offering work or industrial experience will have a managed process and staff advisors to assist both the employer and the student in making the most of the placement. Leeds Metropolitan University, for example, provides extensive resources to help both students and businesses (see Further Resources).

The work experience process can be as simple or as involved as the business requires, but should have some key components. How involved the process becomes depends largely on the staff available to oversee an effective work experience. Big businesses may rely on their training, human resources or operations staff for oversight of work experiences whereas smaller organisations will require a simpler method.

At Lexington Catering there are five annual participants in its two types of university-level work experience, one for currently enrolled college or university students and one for graduates. By keeping the number to five, the quality of the work experience is ensured. Chairman Tim West FIH confirms that some work placements have ultimately been hired for Lexington’s graduate training programme.

No matter what size the business, work experience students can be expected to go through steps similar to those used for the recruitment of permanent staff. The CIPD outlines the steps for employing interns and provides a handy checklist in its publication, *Internships that Work*. The steps are:

- Recruitment
- Payment and duration
- Induction
- Treatment
- Supervision
- Reference and feedback

As the steps confirm, most businesses already have processes in place for the recruitment of staff. Placing a work experience student isn’t onerous and the many benefits reaped by both the student and the business make the process worthwhile.

Anne Pierce of The Springboard Charity recommends the following when setting up a work experience programme:

- Make sure everyone understands each other’s expectations in advance - plan the process and schedule together;
- Don’t view it as simply an opportunity for an extra pair of hands - make it instructive and fun;
- Get buy-in from your whole team - success comes from their support;
- Build the young person’s confidence - in themselves and in our dynamic and vibrant industry;
- Give feedback and careers advice - a star may be born!

The Springboard Charity’s INSPIRE programme is specially tailored for hospitality employers wanting to offer a quality work experience programme. INSPIRE can provide every hospitality business, no matter how small, with the tools to deliver great work experience consistently. In addition, INSPIRE’s quality standard logo is reassuring to hospitality students and academics. Both Lexington Catering and Red Carnation Hotels are two of the many hospitality employers to hold the INSPIRE quality standard and both organisations have benefited from the structure and support provided by INSPIRE.
Making it happen

The Institute of Hospitality and its members have been supporting and promoting education and career development in the hospitality industry for over 75 years. By involving the industry’s key stakeholders – from hospitality academics and industry operators to organisations like Springboard’s INSPIRE – businesses can create authentic work experiences that lead to satisfying careers in hospitality management.

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Further resources

Common Best Practice Code for High Quality Internships – free guidance from the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum.
www.ion.icaew.com/ClientFiles/a42b9c80-6acd-4dca-980a-bac45d9a324d/Interns%20booklet%206.pdf

Graduate Talent Pool – overseen by the UK’s BIS, the site links 2010, 2011 or 2012 graduates seeking quality internships and work experience placements with employers offering opportunities.
graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk

INSPIRE – the hospitality industry’s quality standard scheme for businesses’ work placement schemes. To learn more, ring: 020 7529 8610 or visit: inspire.springboard.uk.net

Institute of Hospitality ebooks held in the eResources Collection:


Internships that Work – A CIPD publication for employers wanting to establish an internship programme.
www.work-experience.org/assets/assets/documents/Internships_that_Work.pdf

National Council for Work Experience (NCWE) –
www.work-experience.org

Prospects.ac.uk – the UK’s official graduate website offering free careers, jobs and work experience information on all sectors including hospitality, sport and tourism.
www.prospects.ac.uk/hospitality_tourism_sport_sector.htm

Springboard UK Career Scope – a comprehensive virtual careers resource for hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism.
careerscope.springboarduk.net

UK Commission for Employment and Skills – general information on employment and skills.
www.ukces.org.uk

DISCLAIMER

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Employer Final Assessment Form

The Carnegie Placement and Employability Unit (CPEU)
Leeds Metropolitan University
G08 Cavendish Hall,
Headingley Campus
Leeds
LS6 3QU
Tel: +44 (0) 113 812 6718
Fax: +44 (0) 113 812 6102
Office Email: placementswork@leedsmet.ac.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/placementswork

Student Name
Employed as:
Organisation/Company

Employed From:  
Employed To:  
Full or Part Time Hours

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A = Excellent / B = Good / C = Satisfactory / D = Fair / E = Poor

Overall Assessment

Additional comments on Performance/Attitude:

Indicate areas for further improvement:

Signed:  
Job Title:  
Telephone:  
Email:  

Please provide your contact details. It is our policy to contact a random selection of employers to confirm that the details submitted have been completed by the signatory.

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