

**THE CATERER**

# **BEST PLACES TO WORK IN HOSPITALITY**

2020

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It's time to reveal *The Caterer's* Best Places to Work in Hospitality 2020, run in partnership with Purple Cubed and sponsored by Umbrella Training. Those listed are employers who recognise and nurture their people and thereby create a healthy, thriving business – crucial characteristics as operators get back on their feet. *Rosalind Mullen* finds out more

In what has been one of the most challenging years for all of your businesses, it's now time to celebrate those of you who were already working hard to be excellent employers before Covid-19 struck, by revealing the 30 Best Places to Work in Hospitality 2020.

This annual celebration of employment best practice in companies large and small, established or entrepreneurial, was introduced by people retention specialist Purple Cubed and *The Caterer*, and yet again it shows that the industry is steadily improving its image as an employer, with the average staff engagement score now at 82%.

A flick through the results shows that 59% of staff would recommend their company as a best place to work, up 6% on last year. Also up 6%, some 55% said their employer treats them well all the time.

What's exciting is that the list is not driven by managers or operators, but by the employees themselves, who filled out an anonymous survey compiled by Purple Cubed. This survey rates the performance of employers in a number of

categories, with the top six concerns for staff reflecting the significance of a positive work culture and team dynamic. They are: "being part of a team that respects each other", "respect for work-life balance", "positive working environment", "working as a team to produce results", "being paid on time" and "communication".

While those listed in the top 30 span the hotel, restaurant, pub and foodservice sectors, their common ground is an understanding of how to get the best out of staff by recognising each individual's needs and ambitions. They will all have gone beyond the minimum requirements of an employer by introducing initiatives ranging from team-building socials to flexible working or mental health support. Most importantly, they give people the tools to progress their careers.

It's worth noting that as these employee surveys were conducted between September 2019 and February 2020, they don't take into account the effects of Covid-19. However, we went back and asked those who made it onto the list to tell us how they went the extra mile for their people during lockdown.

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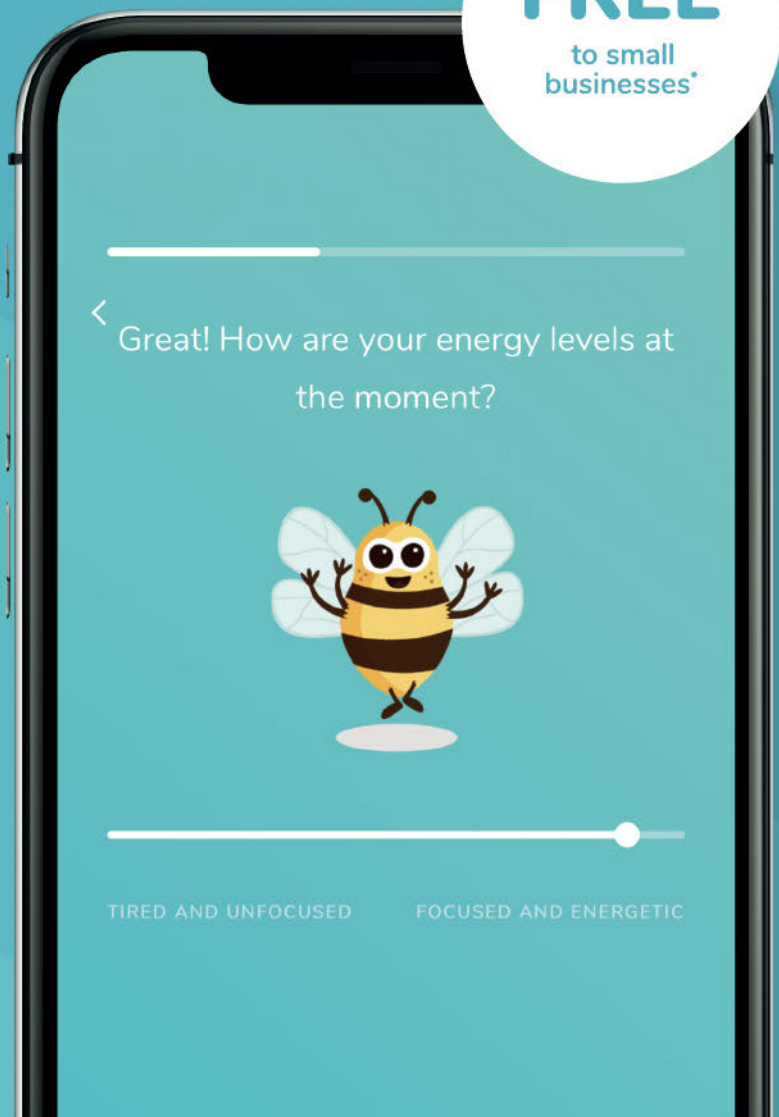
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## SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**

### THE AMBA GROSVENOR

**In a nutshell** This Grade II-listed, 345-bedroom railway hotel recently underwent a multimillion-pound makeover and is part of GLH's four-star Amba brand, which is comprised of three hotels in London

**Location** London Victoria Station

**Employees** 120

Over and over again, employee comments on the Purple Cubed survey echoed the strong atmosphere of trust throughout this hotel, with many flagging up the support they've had in career progression.

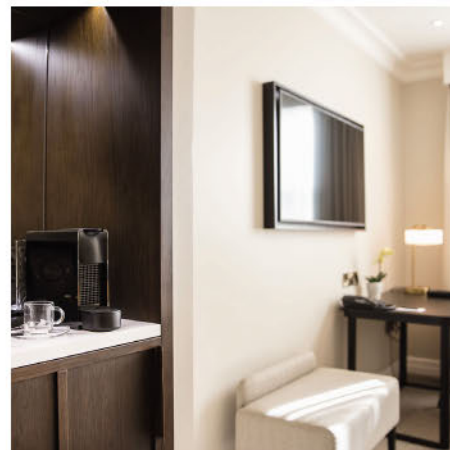
One team member described it as a: "Very well-organised team. Management is definitely keeping their staff aware that they care for everyone's wellbeing and are always there to help out when needed."

These observations proved true during the many months of lockdown, with management showing just how much they value the team by redesigning staff areas to ensure compliance with social distancing and getting the space repainted to make it comfortable in the new normal. They've also invested in touchless door-openers, a change of staff catering to a vending option and sanitising stations.

It's no surprise that another top priority was keeping the teams engaged and communicating with each other. Great two-way communication was already in place, and was cited by 84% of staff in the survey, along with 95% saying they worked well in the team to produce good results.

To encourage this, the HR team has introduced regular quiz events and a new online people portal, Flow, where staff can access e-learning, get regular updates and access tools to support their mental and physical wellbeing. Several team members used it to showcase new skills gained during lockdown, such as training with the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, completing sewing courses, and taking mental health first aid courses.

Crucially, staff benefits have continued, including discounted shopping and home and health initiatives, to help them through this period.





## SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**



### CHEVAL COLLECTION

**In a nutshell** Cheval, founded 40 years ago, has a portfolio of 11 luxury residences, with apartments available to rent from one night to over a year

**Location** Eight in London and three in Edinburgh  
**Employees** 240

This employer has consistently proved that good communication, continuous engagement and transparency are key to creating a rewarding and positive workplace. The strategy's success is backed up by comments in the Purple Cubed survey, such as: "Cheval Collection puts its employees first when it comes to decision-

making all of the time. This is something I've not seen in other companies." And: "The company really cares about its people, and the learning and development opportunities are fantastic."

Some 91% of employees surveyed said respect for work-life balance was good, and 91% were happy with the benefits package.

The company, which operated throughout the pandemic, made it a priority to research new ways to support employee mental health. This included teaming up with Mental Health First Aid England to pilot its Start Well programme, which helps organisations to diagnose any mental health requirements in the team and create a bespoke strategy for the group.

As a result, Cheval is introducing mental health training for managers and awareness training for all; and it's flagging up support services to staff and promoting the national platform Every Mind Matters. Not least, managers' job descriptions now include a remit to promote positive mental health among staff.

Further plans include weekly mindfulness sessions, rewards for random acts of kindness, and initiatives to get teams to mix more, such as online charity and social events, book clubs, and a weekly "fika", or chit-chat.

Physical wellbeing is also on the cards, with weekly online stretching sessions and team step challenges being lined up.



## SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**

### CYCAS HOSPITALITY

**In a nutshell** A hotel management company founded in 2008, working with groups such as Accor, Hyatt, IHG, Marriott and Quest

**Location** 25 properties across the UK, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Belgium

**Employees** 40 in a central support role with about 500 team members or 'Cycadettes'

In April, appreciating the enormous impact of lockdown on people's home and working lives, Cycas teamed up with the Happiness Index. This gave its team members – or Cycadettes – the chance to express their views using the Employee Voice 24/7 link.

Employees working both on-site and off have been encouraged to share whatever they want, from raising ideas or concerns to praising colleagues, which enables the company to capture how individuals feel in real time. Every week it reviews the information, circulates it among the executive committee, cascades key findings to department heads, makes changes for the better and tailors the chief executive's monthly virtual Town Hall meetings to ensure the teams feel their feedback is being addressed.

To get even better feedback from individuals, the company has also revamped its induction and on-boarding process for new employees and introduced a call to the chief executive at the end of a new starter's first day.

Whatever they're doing it works, as 97% of employees canvassed by Purple Cubed say they are motivated and really want to do a good job. Almost as many again feel they are part of a team that respects each other.

"I enjoy what I do. I enjoy going to work. I enjoy being part of a team [where I] have a voice," is one comment that resonates.



SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY****FIRMDALE HOTELS**

**In a nutshell** Tim and Kit Kemp's collection of luxuriously designed boutique hotels

**Location** Five hotels and three townhouse hotels in London; two hotels in New York

**Employees** 1,200

Firmdale has kept its slot in the top six Best Places to Work for the past five years. That's a hefty endorsement of its commitment to boosting staff skills and job satisfaction.

This is underlined in the Purple Cubed report by the fact that 88% would recommend it as a good place to work, either all or most of the time. One of the qualities staff valued most

was that the company has created an environment where people respect each other, with 77% adding that they work well in their team to produce good results.

Several employees described the "family feel" and felt they could "grow and thrive" in the company, with one saying: "Most colleagues are mostly happy to be at work because it feels like home with a passion to deliver service."

Predictably, Firmdale's proactive HR department sprang into action back in March, producing interactive packs to support employees on furlough or who were working from home as the pandemic unfolded. This comprehensive online document offered a Q&A section

on issues such as furlough and money matters as well as contacts for useful organisations, tips on managing wellbeing and stress, suggestions on things to do and quizzes. And to encourage everyone to stay connected there was a £250 incentive for staff who uploaded photos, news and personal tips on Yapster.

As teams are gradually recalled back from furlough, they receive an interactive welcome-back pack showing them the new processes and changes in the hotels so that they feel safe returning to work. Happily, it already has a good record in this regard, with 89% saying they felt it was a safe place to work even before the strictures of Covid.



## SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**



### VALOR HOSPITALITY EUROPE

**In a nutshell** A hotel management company overseeing a portfolio of 17 properties under brands including Hilton, IHG and Marriott. In December 2019 the portfolio was bought by DTGO

**Location** Across the UK  
**Employees** 1,150

Just over 95% of employees who contributed to the Purple Cubed survey said their employer treats its people well all or most of the time, with ratings in the mid-80% range for its great benefits package and the fact it is a good environment to be in.

One comment summed it up: "Valor Hospitality invests in its people, ensuring they receive the best training and development for not only the company's needs, but for the individuals."

These values were reflected in its post-lockdown communications initiative, Valor Team Talk, which aimed to stimulate wellness, good mental health, engagement, gratitude and fun.

As well as a weekly presentation to keep staff informed of business and furlough updates, it also flagged up details of qualified Valor mental health first-aiders and consultative committee representatives who could field any questions and support those who were struggling.

The fun element came through weekly prize-

winning competitions on the company Facebook page, which included craft challenges, best TikTok and selfie contests, upcycling challenges and even a cress-growing competition. It earned the Facebook page 882 posts and more than 30,000 reactions, with staff feedback indicating that the challenges were getting them and their families through a difficult time. Videos and mini-orientations via Teams then prepared furloughed staff for the return to work.

It's all paid off. A recent HR survey of those back at work checked-in with how they are feeling in terms of wellbeing and safety. Happily, 90% said they were "highly confident" about the safety measures and felt "strongly engaged".



## SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**

### RED CARNATION HOTELS

**In a nutshell** A family-owned and run collection of luxury, boutique hotels

**Location** 20 properties across the UK, Ireland, Guernsey, South Africa, Switzerland and Botswana

**Employees** Around 4,000 people worldwide, with 850 in the UK

There's a good reason why this company regularly appears in this top six ranking and this comment in Purple Cubed's survey explains it well: "There is genuine care that comes from the top to all employees. The owners, directors, general managers, etc... We are all very well-looked after."

Indeed, some 96% said they were happy with the two-way communication and the pandemic has reinforced this through evidence of the company's hard work in making sure its skeleton teams and furloughed employees were kept involved and engaged throughout. Initiatives ranged from a Good News Only channel to handwritten messages of motivation to the team, online cocktail and cooking challenges. And, of course, everyone continued to have access to the business' blog, which kept everyone updated, and its Instagram page, which generated a community spirit.

Most importantly, Red Carnation has ramped up its excellent work to ensure the mental and physical health and wellbeing of all employees. In 2019, it launched a Mental Health First Aid training course, which complements Wellbeing Awareness training sessions. Given the recent circumstances, this work has continued "virtually". Messages have been sent almost weekly to the global team, with notes on managing anxiety, getting active your way, financial advice, lockdown lessons, learning opportunities from home, connecting with your team, how to stop negative thoughts from spiralling, and reintegrating back into the world after lockdown.

The fact that this initiative has triggered warm and grateful responses from employees across the board shows that this is an employer with its finger on the pulse.



# Best places to work 2020

**7 BANKSIDE HOTEL**  
**In a nutshell** This chic 161-bedroom hotel is part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, but is independently owned and sets out to be a social hub for guests who seek culture, art and food  
**Location** South Bank, London  
**Employees** 100

As with many cutting-edge employers, the HR team has been sending out weekly newsletters and video updates from the hotel manager to keep the team feeling valued. With the doors set to reopen on 5 October, the focus is now on ensuring staff feel comfortable returning to work. To this end, there's a welcome back gathering and the chance for them to get involved in the "New-us reopening plans".

Bankside has certainly got a track record of looking after its people. Examples of engagement initiatives include: Masterclass Monday, where team members teach colleagues about their own skillset, and Wellbeing/Workout Wednesday, aimed at promoting mental and physical health.

An astonishing 98% of staff surveyed by Purple Cubed said they had a good relationship with their manager. Respect for work-life balance and great communication came out notably high, too.

One comment wraps it up: "It's super and it's magic to work in a place where being yourself is valued and encouraged. It makes for being able to deliver great hospitality."

**8 DAKOTA MANCHESTER**  
**In a nutshell** This privately owned 137-bedroom hotel opened in May 2019 and is the newest addition to the growing Dakota brand  
**Location** Close to Manchester Piccadilly station  
**Employees** 120



As with all employers on this top 30 listing, the priority during lockdown was to maintain strong communication with the furloughed team. The HR team, therefore, conducted regular engagement surveys and Zoom sessions to learn about individual home situations and provide necessary support. Everyone has also had one-to-one time with a member of the HR team and the general manager so they can explain what help they might need on their return.

Rather than chasing occupancy, this hotel's priority has been running incentives to motivate the team and engage them on a more personal level. These have included "thank you" movie days and lunches, and a Lockdown

Legend recognition initiative, which awarded those staff who were most supportive to colleagues during lockdown.

Nearly 93% of staff surveyed pre-lockdown said they found their leaders inspirational and a whopping 99% said they would recommend the company as a best place to work "all or most of the time".

**9 THE PIG IN THE WALL**  
**In a nutshell** With 12 bedrooms, this is the smallest in the shabby-chic, seven-strong Pig litter, owned by Home Grown Hotels and Lime Wood Group  
**Location** Western Esplanade, Southampton  
**Employees** About 18 (850 across the group)

An impressive 94% of employees surveyed at this particular Pig said they were happy to work here – and it's not surprising, judging by the comments. "My manager is outstanding, I honestly couldn't ask for a better one," said one member of staff. "In general, the Pig is a good little team that pull together when necessary," said another.

The team behind the Pigs are dedicated to creating an inspiring and fun place to work, so they recruit people for personality and passion, not just qualifications and skills. And once they're on the payroll, they can access apprentice programmes, a Budding Entrepreneur scheme and in-hotel training.

In the recent pandemic, the company saw the need for an "in-house furlough scheme" to ensure that even those who fell outside of government assistance were supported during tough times. Along with zero redundancies, this has ensured continued tip-top service for guests.

**10 RBH HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT**  
**In a nutshell** A UK-based independent hotel management company, operating more than 45 branded and unbranded hotels, with offices in London and Glasgow  
**Location** Across the UK and Northern Ireland  
**Employees** 1,800

Interestingly, 90% of those surveyed by Purple Cubed before lockdown mentioned RBH's excellent benefits package – a point that was not flagged up by staff at many other companies on the list.

Work-life balance is also sound, as this comment indicates: "[They] always try and do the right thing, the company has values and actually lives by those values and I see it time and time again. Work-life balance is not just a soundbite but a reality."

One plus-point of lockdown was that fresh initiatives have now been permanently put in place to improve communication channels across this large and widespread team.

"Some great ideas have come in over the last few months, and are developed through our regular Microsoft Teams calls on a Monday morning," says one manager. "Initially, set up to 'check in' and make sure everyone was OK, we have found that our people love these calls, and [so they] will continue."

**11 ALOFT LIVERPOOL**  
**In a nutshell** Part of the Marriott brand for tech-savvy urbane travellers, it has 116 bedrooms and a restaurant  
**Location** North John Street, central Liverpool  
**Employees** 55

This hotel's plan to keep in touch with employees during lockdown was both informative and fun. As well as sending out updates on the business and the furlough scheme, they set up quiz nights and cake-making competitions and promoted wellbeing awareness. Staff were also given contact details so that they could raise any concerns privately.

There has always been a strong atmosphere of inclusion here, strengthened by a successful scheme last year whereby five apprentices with autism were given work experience and ultimately found placements.

The HR team has certainly created a strong culture of developing people. Some 85% of employees surveyed by Purple Cubed said they had "opportunities to talk about personal development" and 90% said they had "access to personal development".

This includes the creation of senior managers. "Aloft has been special to me in my development, from a junior restaurant manager to now working as deputy general manager."

**12 AMBA HOTEL CHARING CROSS**  
**In a nutshell** This iconic, Grade II-listed, 239-bedroom station hotel is part of GLH's four-star Amba brand  
**Location** Trafalgar Square, London  
**Employees** 86



It was "all hands on deck" during lockdown, says general manager Pedro da Silva. During this time he's continued his task of engaging a workforce that not only spans 26 nationalities, but also embraces a wide range of years of service and experience.

To ensure they all work well as one team, he's created a culture that recognises everyone's differences. A diversity calendar, for instance, flags up the celebration of cultural milestones and helps nurture collective pride.

Da Silva also keeps things personal by marking every employee's work anniversary date with a handwritten note acknowledging their achievements, along with a gift.

Unsurprisingly, several employees surveyed by Purple Cubed mentioned how supportive their managers were. One said: "This is one of the very few workplaces where it actually is one team one dream. Managers and employees are treated the same, everyone [makes the] guests a priority, and due to that the whole operation works well."

## 13 BELMOND LE MANOIR AUX QUAT'SAISONS

**In a nutshell** Belmond's 32-bedroom manor house hotel and two-Michelin-starred restaurant is fronted by chef-patron Raymond Blanc  
**Location** Great Milton, Oxfordshire  
**Employees** 166



To keep the team settled and well-informed, the HR department and managers have been hosting open discussions via monthly virtual Town Halls. Communication has been strengthened further by an online employee app, a regular welfare check-in programme and one-to-one mini pulse surveys.

Respect for work-life balance was already good, according to 73% of employees surveyed by Purple Cubed, with 77% saying they felt they were part of a company where everyone respected each other.

Although the survey was conducted before lockdown, one comment is particularly prescient: "We understand that not only do people have lives outside of work, but they know they may come in with their own troubles. The company is very supportive to everyone's individual needs and go above and beyond to support colleagues at all levels."

Another said: "The people are the focus; they look after us. They don't always get it right, but are humble enough to admit when they are wrong and learn and develop from that."

## 14 AVIATOR

**In a nutshell** This four-red-AA-star hotel with 169 bedrooms was opened in 2008 by TAG Group and bought by MIRA in 2019  
**Location** Farnborough, Hampshire  
**Employees** 186 (113 permanent and 73 casuals)

Some 92% of those surveyed by Purple Cubed said they had pride in working at this hotel and 86% said it treated its people well. Certainly, the mental wellbeing of employees is top of its agenda. Aviator provided accommodation for NHS workers during lockdown, but whether staff were furloughed or working, they had access to a trained mental health first-aider and mental health champions.

At the beginning of lockdown, managers sought to offset anxiety – particularly among junior employees – caused by supply shortages. In a thoughtful gesture, the executive chef worked with suppliers to source flour, pasta and eggs and put together staff food parcels.

In June, recognising that stress, bereavement and financial problems were likely to increase, the company introduced an Employee Assistance Programme. And to tackle anxiety on returning to work it has implemented training

and appointed a health and safety representative. Stressful redundancies have also been avoided by cross-training employees to work in operational departments.

## 15 ONE ALDWYCH

**In a nutshell** A privately owned and run 102-bedroom luxury hotel in Covent Garden, housing two restaurants – Indigo and Eneko Basque Kitchen & Bar  
**Location** Covent Garden, London  
**Employees** 150

During lockdown, One Aldwych directed energy into making its learning and development strategy even more accessible to the team. To complement its training room and on-job training programmes, it has created an online system on mobile or desktop, allowing staff to learn in short bursts and times that suit them. Launched on 3 September, it provides short modules on a range of topics, with managers creating their own interactive sessions for their departments.

This hotel went into lockdown with some 93% of employees telling Purple Cubed they had good communication with their manager. And a mighty 94% were happy all or most of the time to recommend it to others as a best place to work.

An impressive number also wrote at length about why they love working here. Here's one of the shorter comments: "Excellent management team, most respectful colleagues. Really hard-working and kind, genuine people. Hotel cares about environment, management team listen to employees and keep them happy. Staff truly enjoy coming to work. Best hotel I've ever worked for."

## 16 BENNETT HAY

**In a nutshell** A privately owned bespoke hospitality services company  
**Location** London-based  
**Employees** 200



Last year saw this business create an online platform for employees fronted by a 'happiness officer'. It encouraged teams to communicate, socialise, share knowledge and create a deeper relationship with senior managers.

Unsurprisingly, during lockdown it's been an invaluable tool to offset daily stresses and continue to build relationships. Activities were designed to keep the teams educated and enthused, ranging from Ask AI, a video series where the executive chef shared kitchen tricks and Myth Busters, from the company nutritionist, to the Hospitality for Heroes Charity Challenge and a learning programme

called People Management Summer School.

This employer says it prioritises the wellbeing of its people, and this is backed up by staff feedback, with one praising: "Caring managers who go the extra mile for their employees".

Nearly 90% told the Purple Cubed survey that it was a good environment to work in and 96% said the company has similar values to them.

## 17 SMART GROUP

**In a nutshell** A collection of hospitality, venues, catering and event management businesses incorporating Smart Parties, Moving Venue, Smart Hospitality, Smart Venues, Smart Live and Evolution London. It is also the sole in-house caterer at venues such as Landing Forty Two, Magazine London, Illuminate and Here East  
**Location** Mostly London  
**Employees** 40-50

This seems to be a happy, motivated ship, with some 91% of staff surveyed by Purple Cubed saying they socialised together and 96% saying they wanted to do a good job

One of the company's values is that everyone is given a chance to shine and is rewarded for doing so – and this didn't slip during lockdown. Over recent months, a team of chefs, managers and event planners led by the operations director cooked and delivered more than 50,000 meals for those in need. The logistics meant delivering to 13 hospitals a day, six days a week – as well as to people's homes.

One particular employee comment reveals how this was possible: "Smart is a family; these values are at its core. There's an ethos built on being a team, working hard and playing hard, having energy and passion, and all of this comes from the spirit and nature of our leader Greg Lawson."

## 18 FOODITUDE

**In a nutshell** An independent contract caterer that combines food cooked from scratch with a delivery service to cutting-edge tech and media firms  
**Location** London  
**Employees** 96

With its clients closing their offices thanks to Covid-19, this contract caterer had to shut down its 20,000 sq ft kitchen on 23 March. Within days, however, the management team reopened the kitchen to kick off its Covid-19 Emergency Response, supported by staff who volunteered to cook nutritious meals for vulnerable and isolated people in the community – ultimately cooking around 35,000 meals.

An added benefit, according to management, was that it boosted staff morale and kept everyone connected during an uncertain time. Staff comments back this up, including: "I needed to go out and do something for society" and "I've taken a lot from this community and it's time to give back".

The evidence is that this employer is in tune with its people. About 88% of the team who were surveyed by Purple Cubed before

# Best places to work 2020

lockdown said the company had the same values as them and more than 90% said they were happy to work there.

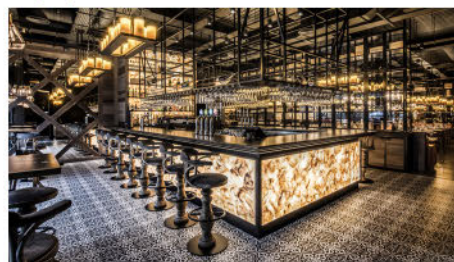
**19 CROWNE PLAZA LONDON – THE CITY**  
**In a nutshell** A four-AA-star, 204-bedroom hotel with two restaurants, part of the 430-strong international Crowne Plaza brand  
**Location** Near Blackfriars station, City of London  
**Employees** 134

Good communication with managers gained the highest rating from employees at this hotel, with 91% agreeing with this statement. Nearly as many said it was a good environment to work in (90%), but other high scores were earned by “being part of a team that respects each other” (87%) and “access to personal development” (80%).

On the latter note, the upscale Crowne Plaza brand has launched a new training programme to improve both service and job satisfaction, called Dare to Connect. This empowers employees to bring their personality to work and make genuine connections with guests. It also helps employees become more attuned to guest needs through a heightened awareness and use of emotional intelligence.

Comments on the Purple Cubed survey indicate that the training in this particular hotel is good across the board. “From everywhere else where my hospitality skills grew, I can honestly say all my skills in this workplace absolutely bloomed,” says one member of the team. Other feedback nails it with the single words: “brilliant” and “excellent”.

**20 CITY DISTRICT**  
**In a nutshell** A privately owned restaurant group with six high-end, South American-inspired rodizio restaurants  
**Locations** Fazenda brand is in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Birmingham; Picanha is in Chester  
**Employees** 325 (post-Covid)



This company already had an open culture whereby staff are encouraged to talk to their managers any time, but lockdown has driven this further with the introduction of employee representatives. They were appointed to ensure a transparent, fair selection process was in place to manage the feared 150 redundancies, although ultimately job losses were kept at 25.

These representatives will now be retained as the employee voice with direct access to the managing director and HR manager via video call every six months. At best, management hopes it can implement any great suggestions

or alleviate employees’ concerns; at worst, they can explain directly why an idea can’t be implemented and so teams will feel listened to.

Among the many positive comments on the Purple Cubed survey, one perhaps sums it up: “I’ve never worked anywhere this great before. The managing director cares about everyone and this is shown through all of head office and all of the managers.”

**21 THE ROYAL AIR FORCE CLUB**  
**In a nutshell** A historic private members’ club founded in 1918 offering five-star accommodation, dining, meetings and events to more than 24,500 serving and former serving RAF officers and their families  
**Location** Mayfair, London  
**Employees** 139

The club remained open in lockdown to provide accommodation to key NHS and Ministry of Defence workers. So, with some employees working at the club, some working from home, and others on furlough, maintaining communication was vital.

A number of lively initiatives were swiftly put in place, including a weekly team newsletter, remote cocktail parties, cooking competitions, virtual games and competitions with prizes delivered to people’s houses, food deliveries to staff who needed them, volunteering opportunities, and wellbeing support.

The Purple Cubed survey indicates this was already a well-engaged team, with 89% of employees saying they had good communication with their manager.

One comment stands out: “Our chief executive leads by example and treats us all as he would wish to be treated himself. He is full of enthusiasm and this filters down through the team. He encourages everyone to excel in their role and encourages personal development.”

**22 ACCENT CATERING SERVICES**  
**In a nutshell** A privately owned contract catering company founded in 2001, specialising in the B&I and education sectors  
**Locations** London and the Home Counties  
**Employees** 650-plus

More than 90% of the team surveyed by Purple Cubed said they were happy to work here all or most of the time, which was a good 10% above the benchmark. It’s no wonder the company wanted to carry that atmosphere through lockdown and beyond.

Therefore, as well as various initiatives to keep everyone in touch, briefing packs were sent to everyone’s email addresses to guide them through the changes in working practices and the new working environment.

Crucially, the company recognised that its teams often work in restricted food preparation and service areas in schools and businesses where social distancing can be more difficult. To manage expectations and keep everyone upbeat, the HR team has sent out a strong message that the safety of employees is as important as that of its customers. So, in

addition to being provided with the necessary PPE, staff have been given extra training before returning to work and have been empowered to manage their own safety through being invited to contribute views to local risk assessments.

**23 45 PARK LANE**  
**In a nutshell** The Dorchester Collection’s five-red-AA-star, 46-bedroom hotel, overlooking Hyde Park  
**Location** Park Lane, London  
**Employees** 125



Creating good teamwork is crucial if you want to retain and motivate staff. Happily, nearly 91% of the employees surveyed at this small hotel said they felt they work well within a team to produce good results and 88% said they are working in a good environment.

This great sense of engagement continued into lockdown, when the hotel’s restaurant manager organised and led a 70km walk for Cruse UK, a charity that supports bereaved people. Pretty much everyone got behind the effort, walking in their gardens, up and down stairs and around their neighbourhoods, to raise £1,890 – more than double the target of £700.

Enthusiased about giving back during the pandemic, managers and staff then joined the company-wide initiative to raise money for Médecins Sans Frontières, by walking the 430km from the Dorchester’s London hotels to its Paris hotels.

Although the Purple Cubed survey happened before lockdown, one employee comment sums it up: “It’s a fantastic company and being part of DC makes me very proud.”

**24 THE PIG AT BRIDGE PLACE**  
**In a nutshell** With 19 bedrooms, plus lodges and huts, this hotel is among the latest to open in the seven-strong Pig litter, owned by Home Grown Hotels and Lime Wood Group  
**Location** Canterbury  
**Employees** 850 employees across all hotels

This is a company that sees its employees as its greatest asset and treats them as such. Not least, its commitment to their development is evident through a strong induction programme, apprenticeships, a Budding Entrepreneur scheme and in-hotel training.

More recently, the group set up an in-house furlough scheme to ensure that even those who fell outside of government assistance were supported during lockdown. According to the HR people, it wasn’t the easy thing to do, but they felt it was the right thing to do. With no redundancies, it’s no wonder the working atmosphere remains vibrant.

At this particular Pig, some 94% of employees said it treats people well. As one team member put it: "The Pig at Bridge Place is an all-around amazing place to work, where employees feel safe and supported. I feel like a valued team member and am always confident to share my opinions as I know they are listened to."

**25 GEORGIAN HOUSE HOTEL**  
**In a nutshell** Built by owner Serena von der Heyde's great-great grandfather, William Chinnery Mitchell, in 1851, this family-run hotel now has 63 bedrooms and apartments  
**Location** St George's Drive, London  
**Employees** 30

Here's another hotel that makes a regular appearance on this listing, thanks to its continual quest to improve employee engagement through caring for and developing the team.

One particular comment in the Purple Cubed survey underlines this: "They listen when you raise issues and do their utmost to provide solutions to the issues. It's a great place to work, where the leaders/management really value their staff."

Notably, 85% of those surveyed said they had good communication with their manager – which has never been more important than in the past few months. As well as regular catch-up chats, a wellbeing survey and a return-to-work questionnaire enabled managers to provide extra support for any staff in difficult financial, physical, or mental situations.

As a pledge of how much this family-run company values its small team, returning staff were greeted with wellbeing packs of goodies, as well as being offered top-up training and upskilling opportunities to help them gain confidence.

**26 THE PALOMAR, THE BARBARY, JACOB THE ANGEL & THE BLUE POSTS**

**In a nutshell** The Palomar family of eateries has grown over the last few years to include the Barbary, Jacob the Angel, Evelyn's Table and the Blue Posts

**Location** London

**Employees** Not known yet as still reopening

There's a family vibe here, with managers earning this comment from one member of staff in the Purple Cubed survey: "They are [a] support to staff who need an extra hand in life. Like family would."

The figures in the survey show this isn't a solo sentiment. Some 77% of employees said the leaders at this company were inspirational and 85% highlighted that it was both a good environment to be in and that they felt they were part of a team that respected each other.

Even in lockdown this ethos was apparent, with one of the Palomar's chefs, Christian Bourne, teaming up with Truffles Delicatessen's Lee Smyth to cook 1,000 meals a week for the emergency night-shift workers at Royal Free and NHS Whittington hospitals. Other head chefs in the Palomar group got involved, too, including Luke Selby, Omri McNabb and

Daniel Alt, ultimately raising £12,000 to provide further meals for NHS workers.

**27 MANDARIN ORIENTAL HYDE PARK LONDON**  
**In a nutshell** A five-red-AA-star, 181-bedroom hotel with a number of celebrated restaurants, including Dinner by Heston Blumenthal  
**Location** Knightsbridge, London  
**Employees** 650

The Purple Cubed survey has revealed a contented crew at this hotel. In fact, more than 90% said they were happy to work there and a similar percentage said it treats employees well.

One employee went as far as to say: "Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park is the best hotel I've ever worked in. I have been lots of opportunities to develop myself and my career. We also have great benefits such as benefits platform, discounted room rates and the best canteen in London, just to name a few."

During lockdown, everyone was kept on their toes with the introduction of a company-wide virtual learning hub. About 3,000 staff joined training sessions on a voluntarily basis to further develop their skills and knowledge.

Closer to home, the hotel worked hard to keep employees engaged and connected – if only virtually – by encouraging them to support the community and share ways that they have been looking after their own wellbeing and self-development during furlough.

**28 GRANTLEY HALL**  
**In a nutshell** A privately owned luxury hotel and wellness retreat with 47 bedrooms, four restaurants, three bars, and a spa and gym  
**Location** Ripon, North Yorkshire  
**Employees** 240



Employees at this hotel gave top ratings of around 90% for the benefits packages and being given access to personal development, with 81% of those surveyed also flagging up that it is a good environment to work in.

Take this employee comment for proof of good morale: "Great support for staff available financially and personally. Rota provided very well in advance. Full training and brilliant learning and development programme at [the] beginning of working here."

The HR team wanted to maintain this positive vibe during the uncertainty of lockdown, so it worked with the marketing team to send out a fun, upbeat online weekly newsletter. Staff were encouraged to share anything from their home life, from photos of their pets to exercise tips. Other popular content included quizzes and

meditation guides. And the senior sous chef even set-up an online shop selling t-shirts, with all proceeds going to Hospitality Action.

**29 CORBIN & KING**  
**In a nutshell** Run by Chris Corbin and Jeremy King, who as business partners for the past 40 years have created many iconic restaurants  
**Locations** The Wolseley, the Delaunay, Brasserie Zédel, Colbert, Fischer's, Soutine and the recently reopened Bellanger, all in London.  
**Café Wolseley at Bicester Village**  
**Employees** 66

While this employer adopted similar communication tools to many others on this list during lockdown, it set itself apart by campaigning for the staff financially. As troncs was not included in the furlough calculations, it launched a gift voucher scheme encouraging customers to buy dining credits and gave 50% of the value to topping up the staff's salary. Similarly, when the company launched its Home Dining delivery service, profits were donated to the staff fund.

This has unsurprisingly led to a boost in staff loyalty. Management has had a huge amount of feedback thanking them for how they conducted themselves as their employer, with staff highlighting that the company's lockdown communications strategy and return-to-work training had made them feel included and informed.

This was on the cards. When Purple Cubed ran its survey before lockdown, some 89% of staff said their leaders are inspirational, with over 91% saying they would recommend it to others as a best place to work.

**30 THE DORCHESTER**  
**In a nutshell** Part of the Dorchester Collection, this iconic five-red-AA-star, 250-bedroom hotel is steeped in history having first opened in 1931  
**Location** Park Lane, London  
**Employees** 600

It may host some of the most glamorous guests from around world, but the Dorchester showed its mettle during lockdown by encouraging employees to help local communities.

As one member of the HR team points out it was also good "for us at the Dorchester to get together in person".

For instance, many of the team helped to pack up to 900 food hampers each week for vulnerable families. Chefs and supplies were also redeployed to provide meals for keyworkers' children being looked after at Manorfield primary school in east London. As lockdown eased, the chefs hosted pizza-making parties for the children and taught them about healthy diets.

Hotel employees also joined work parties to spruce up outdoors study centre Gorsefield, and raised £2,000 through a silent auction, with donations including a cookery class from the head chef and a shift-swap from the general manager.

More than 93% of employees said they were proud to work at the hotel before lockdown – and that looks set to continue.



# Innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship through meaningful apprenticeships

As businesses are forced to make cuts and reshape their workforce, investing in apprentices could bring increased productivity and staff retention, as well as reduced costs. *Jo Simovic* explains

**U**KHospitality reports that 36% of pubs, bars and restaurant owners anticipate permanently closing some of their sites. Even more worryingly, almost 67% of them anticipate they will be laying off some staff rather than bringing them back from furlough – despite the £1,000 grant for every employee who returns from furlough and is retained until 31 January.

It is an incredibly difficult time to be focusing on people development planning, with the question of survival looming over most hospitality businesses.

It feels like a long time ago when the 'Hospitality and Tourism workforce landscape' report from June 2019 stated that 17% of hospitality and tourism vacancies were hard to fill due to skills lacking among applicants.

Fast-forward a year and we now have a surplus of skilled applicants who are looking for jobs, hopefully temporarily.

The same report stated that 7% of the current hospitality and tourism workforce are not fully proficient at their jobs. With new regulations around Covid-19, we know that this number will have increased significantly in the past three months.

When we consider all the additional knowledge, skills and behaviours needed in the time of Covid-19, this paints a clear picture that there is a need for a comprehensive people development strategy to be able to continue operating at the same or higher efficiency levels.

The furlough scheme has helped the industry immensely, but people have been out of work and need a way to up their work readiness – to develop new skills and hone the old ones.

The Gartner Consultancy report tells us that Covid-19 hasn't just changed the workplace; it has likely changed the complexion of the workforce forever – and work itself.

An example of this would be that a head office team could be working from home, removing the need for a central premises. There is a

change in the way we serve and greet guests or visitors into buildings.

The emphasis is on businesses moving from a static to an agile planning approach and reshaping workforces to incorporate this shift.

We believe that differentiated talent and competitive advantage can be found by employing and developing apprentices.

There is plenty of evidence to support the claim that workforce 'futuring' of this kind delivers greater flexibility, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. It is important to start 'futuring' now, to capitalise on the best talent and have them developed to deliver on the most important projects quickly and efficiently.

With government grants, levy gifting and wage subsidies, apprenticeships should be part of activity-based budgeting, with profitability coming through apprenticeship projects and increased labour flexibility and efficiency.

The researched benefits of apprenticeships are increased productivity, staff retention, reduced cost and more diverse workforce.

Another key benefit is increased profit. An article authored by Lynn Gambin and Terence Hogarth in 2016 stated that at BT, apprentices gained £1,300 more net profit compared to non-apprentices.

The same piece explained how, at BAE Systems, apprentices fulfilled tasks correctly first time at a rate of 85% after completing their

training, in comparison to external recruits who did the same task right the first time at a rate of 60%.

There is no academic research into apprenticeships in hospitality, but anecdotal evidence is supporting the research findings from other industries.

We have seen how a number of apprenticeship projects have helped to increase productivity through innovation and creativity; for example, a redesign of the position of a bar inventory to increase the speed of service and number of cocktails produced, the review of cancellation policies for rooms, or creative changes, such as replacing the use of napkins between cloches in room service with rubber rings, which has saved thousands of pounds across a hotel group.

The collective saving and revenue generation of these projects in UK-based hospitality was just under £100,000. The collective spend was £15,000 from apprenticeship levy.

Outside of the direct cost savings or revenue generation, we are not taking into account any of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that these apprentices implemented in the workplace which would add significantly to the benefit of the businesses.

Evolution of the guest expectations, work and the workforce are forcing us to think differently.

In these times of change, future leaders of hospitality businesses need structured development that is supporting them to provide you with the competitive advantage.

It is up to you to 'future' for success through apprenticeships. You could be sitting in your own 'Dragon's Den', listening to your apprentices deliver creative solutions and entrepreneurial apprenticeship projects that help your business recover and leap ahead of the competition.

*Jo Simovic is chief operating officer at Umbrella Training*

**“There is a need for a comprehensive people development strategy to be able to continue operating at the same or higher efficiency levels”**



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