

TOURISM TRAINING FORUM FOR WALES

New mentoring scheme for Welsh chefs has the right ingredients

An exciting new training scheme to improve standards in the Welsh hospitality industry got underway in Cardiff this week showing experienced chefs how to mentor their staff and raise skills in the kitchen.

The workshop is part of the new Applied Ability Awards programme, known as the Triple A, which aims to close the worrying skills gap in the hospitality sector.

The Awards will raise the skills of learner chefs through on-the-job training and mentorship followed by a final, practical exam.

Triple A offers a structured, formalised training programme which chefs can adapt to suit their needs, allowing them to offer in-house training to their staff.

Eight chefs from both the private and public sector across South Wales attended the workshop organised by Welshpool-based training provider Cambrian Training Company held at Cardiff brewery S. A. Brain.

With guidance from programme co-ordinator Ruth Morris the chefs learned how to become a mentor to inspire, motivate and coach their staff to complete the Triple A and improve their skills.

They were shown how to offer guidance and support throughout the learning process by completing a "Skill Scan" to address the learner's weak areas and to prepare an action plan together as they follow the course syllabus.

Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, the programme is being driven by Cambrian Training Company and managed by the Tourism Training Forum for Wales.

Arwyn Watkins, Cambrian Training Company's managing director, said Triple A offers benefits to employers, staff and the hospitality sector as whole.

"Employers told us they wanted to address the skill shortage and chefs said they wanted to be able to benchmark themselves," he said.

"With the cost of ingredients and energy increasing, the skills-set of the chef is a critical factor in an organisation's success. Our workshops are intended to supply well-trained quality chefs to run the kitchens of Wales."

The two year project has the backing of all the chef associations across the UK and Ireland.

Tourism Training Forum Wales director Diana James said: "The Triple A, for the first time, provides a common and consistent training standard that has the confidence of the industry. Importantly it is designed for chefs by chefs and will mean that tomorrow's chefs have the best skills to drive the hospitality sector forward."

Dave Johns, training and development chef for well known Cardiff brewers S. A. Brain, who own a chain of pubs across Wales and the West country, attended the workshop to learn more about how Triple A could help raise his staff's skill levels.

The 36-year-old has worked for Brains for six years and is responsible for training the company's 500 chefs working across 120 pubs. Having worked as a chef for 20 years, he has witnessed a widening skills gap in the industry and believes the Triple A programme has the potential to address this problem.

"When I started, my head chef trained me in the basics from scratch," he said. "He brought in a beef carcass so we could learn how to cut and prepare meat. But these days more food is bought in fully prepared and new chefs are missing out on the basics. I have met some head chefs who can't make a Yorkshire pudding."

Having qualified through the NVQ system, Dave is enthusiastic about the benefits of a formalised training programme for chefs like the Triple A.

"Brains operates a "Silver Award" scheme to train our chefs in house and we hope the Triple A scheme will marry up with it," he said. "Training is key to developing staff and I think that older, more experienced chefs should give something back and allow others to benefit from their experience."

"For employers it makes perfect business sense - a more highly-skilled chef can add value and uniqueness and can make the most of local, seasonal ingredients."

S. A. Brain plans to put 120 of its chefs through the scheme as both mentors and learners.

Judith Sargent, training and quality manager for Cardiff County Council's Schools and Lifelong Learning Direct Service Unit Group, oversees the training programme for 650 kitchen staff working in both schools and staff catering venues.

With 15 years' experience in the school catering sector, Judith attended the workshop to learn how Triple A could improve the skills of staff feeding the county's school children and council staff.

The Welsh Assembly Government's "Appetite for Life" scheme promotes healthy eating in schools and has placed new demands on those tasked with providing healthier meals, sparking the need for further training, explained Judith.

"The drive to source more local, ethically-produced and Fair Trade foods is now more of a consideration," she said. "We now source Welsh Lamb and Welsh Beef and Welsh free-range eggs. While we meet all statutory training obligations, we have identified that we need to expand our skills and hope that the Triple A can help us to address this.

"Giving our staff the right training opportunities is very important to the Catering Direct Service Unit. This scheme offers structured, practical on the job mentoring coupled with a final practical exam that we can tailor to suit our needs."

As part of the programme, a National Chefs' Conference and Skills Competition will be held at Sophia Gardens, Cardiff on November 19 and 20.



AAA Wales Programme Co-ordinator Ruth Morris (centre) with people who attended the mentors workshop at S. A. Brain, Cardiff. The mentors are Julie Bishop, Dave Johns and Doug Field of S. A. Brain, Chloe Lister of Angel Hotel, Cardiff, Judith Sargant of Cardiff County Council and Fiona Silver, Amanda Webb and Julie Jones of VT Training.