

THE CATERER

**BEST
PLACES TO
WORK
IN HOSPITALITY**

2021

Sponsored by



UmbrellaTraining



In partnership with

Purple Cubed

THE CATERER BEST PLACES TO WORK IN HOSPITALITY 2021



Sponsored by



Purple Cubed

In partnership with

In what has been a year like no other, *The Caterer* is celebrating the top 30 Best Places to Work in Hospitality, in partnership with Purple Cubed and sponsored by Umbrella Training. While many operators already go above and beyond to nurture their people, those on the list have pushed even harder to focus on staff wellbeing and create a healthy, thriving business during the pandemic. *Rosalind Mullen* reports

This annual showcase of employment best practice in companies across all sectors, large and small, established or entrepreneurial, was introduced in 2014 by Purple Cubed and *The Caterer*, and after the challenges of the past year the results underline the industry's determination to consistently improve its image as an employer.

As ever, the Best Places to Work in Hospitality survey is not driven by managers or operators, but by the employees themselves, who fill out an anonymous survey created by Purple Cubed.

This year's survey had a new, simpler format.

The highest-scoring question was "My company supported and treated me well throughout Covid-19", with 76% scoring 9-10. Similarly, "Overall, I am proud of the way my company handled the pandemic" also came in at 76% scoring 9-10. Some 74% scored 9-10 for "My company prepared me well for reopenings and/or changes to the way we operate". Communication was the area that businesses succeeded the least, although still only 12% scored it six or less in response to: "I felt informed about what was happening with my company throughout 2020."

Founder and chief executive of Purple

Cubed Jane Sunley was pleased to see record entries this year: "The competition was tough, and standards extremely high, with an overall average score of 93%. Only the very best of the best made the top 30," she said.

"All entrants are to be congratulated. It's great to see resounding evidence that so many hospitality businesses did a great job at handling the pandemic and taking care of their teams in very trying circumstances."

The results can be found over the next pages, with the top six presented in alphabetical order. These businesses now qualify for the Best Employer Award shortlist at the 2021 Cateys. ▶

Umbrella Training



Umbrella Training is a leading nationwide training and apprenticeship provider.

Founded in 2012 by Adele Oxberry, the company works with hotels, restaurants, foodservice businesses and many corporate services organisations across the UK. Since its inception, Umbrella Training has supported the recruitment, development

and progression of more than 2,000 apprentices.

The company understands how important it is for employers to maximise return on investment while implementing meaningful apprenticeship programmes. Umbrella Training works collaboratively with learner and employer partners to deliver quality, consistent training to apprentices.

In 2020, Umbrella Training was named the winner of the Princess Royal Training Award for its commitment to continued development of its team.

The company is also recognised as a 'Good' provider by Ofsted with 'outstanding features'. It is also one of the leading providers for the Education & Skills Funding Agency in the UK.

HASSLE-FREE EMPLOYEE SURVEYS BY PEOPLE SPECIALISTS.

BACK TO BUSINESS | WELLBEING | DIVERSITY &
INCLUSION | VALUES | BESPOKE SURVEYS

TO FIND OUT MORE:



Purple
Cubed.

Or visit purplecubed.com/surveys



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 from one night to one year or longer

Location Eight in London and three in Edinburgh
Employees 240

Not only has Cheval been operating throughout the pandemic, but it has also taken over the management of three properties in Edinburgh, which involved training and onboarding the new teams.

In fact, the company has weathered the past year remarkably well. In its recent engagement survey, employees rated the company's response to the pandemic as 9/10.

This chimes with the Purple Cubed survey, where comments from employees about how the company looked after them include: "The senior managers were with their teams on site, providing the support needed", "we were kept in the loop on everything", and "the company had to introduce new ways of working and during those times it has done its best to ensure we are supported".

Mental health has been at the top of the agenda with the launch of its internal "looking out for each other" mental health awareness programme.

"We are encouraging colleagues to check in with each other and spot signs of when their colleagues might need support," says engagement and talent manager Mari Warby. "The programme also aims to normalise conversations around mental health and that it's OK not to be OK. Managers have also had separate mental health awareness training."

The past year has seen several new people initiatives. For instance, the company changed its annual appraisal to a "wellbeing check-in", which was well-received, and fun elements to keep furloughed staff engaged included a virtual travel club that "visited" Finland, Japan, Thailand and Machu Picchu in Peru.





RECRUIT. TRAIN. RETAIN.

Meaningful hospitality
and management
apprenticeships
with industry
experts.

Get in touch today to find out how
we can help you create a strong,
sustainable and future proofed
people strategy through
apprenticeships and the
Government **Kickstart Scheme**.



For more information contact us at:

0333 577 2557

info@umbrellatraining.co.uk | www.umbrellatraining.co.uk



Winner of
PRINCESS ROYAL
TRAINING AWARD
2020





SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**



THE DORCHESTER

In a nutshell The flagship of the Dorchester Collection, this iconic five-red-AA-star, 250-bedroom hotel is steeped in history, having first opened in 1931 and just celebrated 90 years
Location Park Lane, London
Employees 525

It's perhaps fitting that this most cosmopolitan of hotels has made diversity and inclusion (D&I) a huge focus this year. And to its credit, it has done so despite the small matter of a global pandemic.

As well as launching a committee to focus on celebrating, educating and communicating

D&I, the company hosted a virtual International Women's Day panel on Zoom where key leaders answered questions about their careers and how gender may have affected them in the workplace. This work to celebrate and educate around differences will continue through an online platform and other events.

Unsurprisingly, mental wellbeing has also been a focus throughout the past year, and the hotel recently celebrated Mental Health Awareness Week with initiatives such as doggy distress, mental health first-aider walk-and-talks, a running club and a cycling competition. Thanks to this, the hotel has notched up a level two award from London Healthy Workplace.

The hotel has also continued to encourage employees to help local communities, with many volunteering at two vaccination centres at the beginning of March.

It's clearly a large but happy ship. Some 97% of staff surveyed said they felt supported and informed by their managers during the pandemic. "I was so overwhelmed by how my company kept us busy with classes, training, health-check calls and coffee morning chats," reported one.

Another sums it up: "Despite the large number of employees, it feels like a small family, looking after each other like parents after their children."



SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**

KAFFEINE

In a nutshell An independently owned Australian café company with two sites

Location Great Titchfield Street and Eastcastle Street in Fitzrovia, London

Employees 20 (23 in March 2020, only one voluntary redundancy)

Take this as an example of employer best practice. Last July, Westminster Council launched its alfresco dining programme. It did not, however, include Great Titchfield Street, where Kaffeine was trading as a takeaway. So on 7 August 2020, director Peter Dore-Smith started a social media campaign to operate alfresco service in the street, including the eight other businesses there – Riding House Café, Meraki, Scandinavian Kitchen, Franks Coffee House, Sergio’s, Mac & Wild, HT Harris café and deli and Gitane.

“Without alfresco dining, many people would simply have lost their jobs,” says Dore-Smith. “BBC News London picked up the story and within a week Westminster had installed barriers and we had tables outside, which continue today. Because of this, we were able to bring back two extra staff per day from furlough and Sergio’s, Riding House Cafe, Meraki and Mac & Wild were able to open their doors and have a chance of survival.”

The rewards for being so intensely people-centric are plain to see. A whopping 100% of staff told Purple Cubed they felt supported and informed during the pandemic.

One employee comment says it all: “Friends of mine were being told they were being laid off. Peter assured us he’d do everything to keep us employed and paid until there’s literally no money left to use. This was prior to the furlough scheme announcement.”

Another said: “Our company always cares about the physical and mental condition of employees and always encourages us to face life with a positive and optimistic attitude. This is really helpful.”





SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**



PPHE

In a nutshell An international hospitality and real estate group with licence from Radisson Hotel Group to develop and operate Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts. It also wholly owns and operates the Art'otel brand

Location 46 properties across six countries

Employees 1,300 in the UK

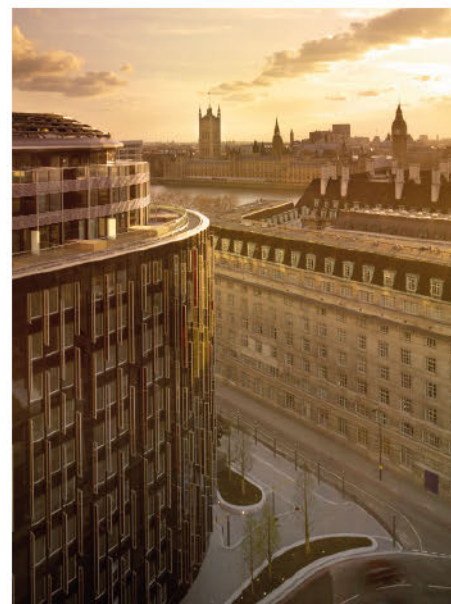
This is a big employer, so it is arguably more of a challenge to get the personal touches right. However, employee feedback on the Purple Cubed survey reveals that most staff have felt fully embraced throughout the pandemic, with some 87% saying they were well supported, informed and prepared for their return to work.

The personal management style is a recurring theme in employee comments: "My manager has checked in with me regularly to see how I am doing both in work and personally. That has meant a lot to me," said one.

Other feedback reveals why employees are keen to return. "The experience was great over the past year, although it has been the toughest year, not just professionally, but personally. The company has given me support and I am excited for the future."

To support and welcome employees back to a safe working environment, the HR team has created a 'welcome back' and 'big thank you' programme. This consists of a range of engagement initiatives and training interventions, both face-to-face and online. There is a big focus on physical health and mental wellbeing and creating a comfortable and inspiring place to work.

The programme includes engagement and interactions at all levels of the business with leadership team-building and team member activities. And just to make sure everyone feels loved, they all receive a 'welcome back pack' with some treats, information documents and safety protocols.





SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**

THOMAS FRANKS

In a nutshell A privately owned, founder-led contract catering company working across B&I, independent schools and the care sectors

Location Some 140 locations in the UK and internationally

Employees 1,400 (1,600 last year)

The challenges of the past year have galvanised this ethical employer to focus even more on the wellbeing of its people, clients and customers, and on supporting local communities.

For instance, it recently launched the Thomas Franks Beyond Education – Being Human Programme, which centres on community, nutrition and cooking, and was born out of the Thomas Franks Foundation Feeding Communities, which began at the start of the pandemic.

Under the new initiative, the company’s chefs, nutritionist and learning and development team put together a training programme to teach students about health and nutrition while cooking healthy meals to be distributed to charities in the community.

“The work has generated kindness, positivity, teamwork and a shared sense of collective responsibility, out of a crisis that could have been felt by many to be overwhelming,” says head of HR Victoria Freeman.

As well as developing Beyond Education further this year, the company is also launching three new initiatives: You Grow – We Grow, to re-establish a connection with where food comes from; Surplus to Purpose, in partnership with the Real Junk Food Project; and We Cook – You Cook, aimed at educating local families from client’s kitchens on how to cook healthy and nutritionally sound meals.

To date, the team has provided more than 650,000 fresh, free meals and more than 1,000,000 surplus food products to those in need.

One wonderful side-effect of these initiatives is that they have helped with team morale too, with 92% saying they felt well supported and informed last year. “The launch of Feeding Communities gave many people who were furloughed a purpose in challenging times,” said one employee.





SHORTLISTED FOR **BEST EMPLOYER CATEY**



VICTORIAN HOUSE

In a nutshell A new 20-bedroom boutique hotel, the country cousin of London's Georgian House
Location Broadgate, Grasmere Village, Cumbria
Employees Six permanent (rising to 10 with temporary summer staff)

Owner Serena Von der Heyde is doing something right, as this hip hotel has been short-listed as a best place to work within a year of opening at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 – and her other property, Georgian House in London, is listed every year.

In keeping with its city sister, Victorian House showcases an exceptional workplace

culture where employee wellbeing is at the forefront. Despite opening during such challenging times, the team have pulled together and taken the opportunity to do cross-skills training. This has given them an in-depth knowledge of the overall business, and turned them into a dynamic, efficient and resilient team.

The operations manager has held regular updates to keep those on furlough up to speed on changes and to ensure they feel included. To motivate and engage everyone ready for reopening, the team were offered green belt training and project opportunities, and were assigned an area of the business in which to make efficiency improvements. This has led

to 100% of respondents saying they felt supported and informed throughout the past year.

Von der Heyde is particularly strong on giving responsibility. "Each team member has an area of expertise and is responsible for its smooth function. All areas in the business are equally respected as everyone knows how hard each job is – housekeeping is as valued as reception," she says.

One member who has swiftly risen through the ranks agrees: "This company has been amazing for opportunities, giving me support in my career and trusting my capabilities. This trust has helped me to stay longer and grow. It's an invaluable trait for a company."

7 FOREST PARK COUNTRY HOTEL & INN

In a nutshell A privately owned country house hotel and inn

Location New Forest National Park
Employees 68 (39 March 2020)



After the lockdowns of the past year, the leadership team wanted to find a way to build on the hotel's success and reward their main asset – the employees. To this end, a payroll and benefit-led incentive was launched in May to reward loyal staff and promote workplace satisfaction and retention.

While the hotel has always paid above minimum wage, a hotel-wide pay rise was awarded on reopening, along with increased holidays for longevity of employment, and bonuses to boost retention in the kitchen department.

Collectively, the incentives are intended to improve an already good retention of staff and further improve workplace harmony.

Something's working well, as 99% of respondents to the Purple Cubed survey said they were well supported, informed and proud to work for their company.

8 THE NINTH

In a nutshell A relaxed neighbourhood restaurant with a Michelin star, serving French and Mediterranean dishes

Location Fitzrovia, London
Employees 20 (21 pre-Covid)



Regular team Zoom meetings have kept everyone in the loop over the past year, and an unexpected bonus is that it has brought the team closer together.

Chef-owner Jun Tanaka says: "It was an incredibly uncertain time for the employees and the business, so I felt it was essential to be as open and honest as possible. I was completely transparent about the business' finances. The meetings were also an opportunity for employees to ask questions. We

discussed and shared ideas for generating revenue for the business during lockdown."

In March, managers arranged one-to-one Zoom meetings to find out how each staff member was feeling and whether they were thinking about changing careers. More importantly, they could identify what those who were returning to work wanted to learn.

"This crisis is an opportunity to demonstrate that the company truly values its people. It's during challenging times that a company shows its true colours," says Tanaka.

His team agree. "I really appreciate that the management listens to you when you need them and any thoughts, ideas or opinions are welcomed," reported one insider to Purple Cubed.

9 CLEVEDON HALL

In a nutshell Privately owned, 25-bedroom exclusive-use mansion house and estate

Location Clevedon, north Somerset
Employees 23 rising to 30 by July (16 pre-Covid)

Here is a company that has seen no redundancies, only growth, because it has spent the past year making strategic plans for the long-term. In late 2020, the company recognised the team would be nearly doubling over the coming months, so a new initiative was needed to enhance the strong in-house culture and induct new staff.

Cue the Flywheel concept, which was created with input from the entire team, meaning that everyone buys into it.

The initiative kicked in last month and focuses on "pride" – chosen because it is subjective, personal and easily referenced throughout the business. The message is that the company wants staff to be proud to work at Clevedon Hall – and that works both ways. If individuals take pride in their work, it drives the business forward in terms of the client experience, business success and ultimately team opportunities.

"All we ask for is pride. If what you do looks, sounds or feels like pride, the wheel has no choice but to keep on turning at an ever-greater speed," explains managing director James Matthews.

10 RESTAURANT ANDREW FAIRLIE

In a nutshell Independently run, two-Michelin-starred restaurant

at the heart of Gleneagles hotel
Location Auchterarder, Perthshire
Number of employees 31 (added 1 for reopening)

In a time of uncertainty, the senior team at this two-Michelin-starred restaurant felt the most important thing they could do was offer as much normality and stability to their colleagues as possible.

Through the first lockdown this included maintaining salaries at 100% and ensuring regular communication with colleagues who had gone back to their often far-flung homes. The second lockdown proved tougher to maintain the 100% salary, so it relied more heavily on

furlough. The message, however, was that nobody in the team should have any doubt about their future and that it was a case of "when" rather than "if" they returned.

Chef Stevie McLaughlin's socially distanced country walks with his chefs proved to be a particularly successful way of keeping the team briefed and in the loop. As a result, all but one of the whole brigade has come back, and an insider reports that they are "brimming with confidence and ready to get back in the saddle".

11 SAM'S RIVERSIDE

In a nutshell Launched in November 2019 by Sam Harrison, with 100 seats

inside and a terrace of 32 (plus 24 under the government deregulation). Harrison and business partner Fanny Stocker opened a food shop, Sam's Larder, last August
Location Hammersmith, London
Employees 52 and recruiting (39 in March 2020)



The airy restaurant is a linchpin in the regeneration of Hammersmith's Riverside Walk and its continued success is thanks to the team's dedication.

As well as being rewarded with discounts and staff meals, what business partners Sam Harrison and Fanny Stocker really pride themselves on is providing good training. All staff have a full day's induction and are allocated a "buddy", who takes them through their first week. And when it comes to the menu, every staff member tastes each new dish before it goes live.

Much of the Purple Cubed employee feedback hints at a tight-knit, loyal team, with comments such as: "We're a big family and a sense of belonging is always felt throughout. It is a home away from home."

Once life has normalised, staff visits to suppliers' farms, vineyards and sites will be back on the agenda. Stocker highlights a partnership with Phoenix Farm, a community farm and learning resource in White City.

"We buy fruit and vegetables from them and prior to returning to work the staff spent a day at the farm, hearing about their community work and getting stuck in with the gardening," says Stocker. "They loved it and came back full of enthusiasm for the produce, the initiative and the people who run it. The restaurant adds an extra £1 donation to each bill, which goes to the charity, but most importantly the staff can talk to customers about [the produce] with first-hand experience."

12 ST ERMIN'S HOTEL
In a nutshell A privately owned, four-red-AA-star, 331-bedroom hotel, part of the Autograph Collection
Location St James's, London
Employees 128 (170 in March 2020)



A common thread from this hotel's employee feedback is that the team loves hospitality, with three words resonating: fun, love and energy.

People director Carol Paddison says those words sum up what the business does to makes its people feel loved, supported and valued. "It fosters an open and accessible workplace, where people contribute their ideas, and we listen and act accordingly," she says.

In such a fast-paced industry, Paddison believes it is important to feel the "pulse" of employees more regularly than an annual survey, so she's introducing bi-weekly short surveys, which will give a picture of how the team are feeling at any time, and will highlight areas that need to be focused on to continue to nurture a great workplace atmosphere.

It's clearly working already. More than three-quarters of Purple Cubed respondents left glowing reports of their experience during lockdown, with comments such as: "My company was able to support me and treated me well even before furlough." Or "Our payroll situation has been clear since the pandemic started, which gave me confidence and relief and we were able to access the hotel's online training to improve our skills."

13 ORIENTAL CLUB
In a nutshell A private members' club founded in 1824
Location Mayfair, London
Employees 52

Communication is clearly a priority for this company, with some 98% of Purple Cubed respondents saying they felt supported and informed.

One insider sheds some light on why: "Couldn't have asked for a better experience during these unprecedented times. The Club went above and beyond keeping all staff updated, well informed, supported and involved, with a regular schedule of staff calls with so much effort. From magicians to quizzes, Disney singers and gorillas – we've had it all. I am extremely proud to be part of this team."

While the club already had a strong culture of family, during the first lockdown the leadership team felt it was important that the business adopted a set of core values to give team

members guidance and a sense of security when they returned from furlough.

As a result, they established four core values: exceptional, heritage, agile and spirited. These have been linked to a set of core competencies that will be used for future recruitment, recognition and performance measurement. An interactive training programme has also been developed internally to help the team to understand and live the values on a daily basis.

14 DAKOTA MANCHESTER
In a nutshell A privately owned, 137-bedroom hotel that 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 has been to maintain strong communication with the furloughed team. Since last year, the HR team has 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.

With opportunities to boost business negligible this year, the 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.

This care has been well-received. "Throughout the pandemic the company was determined to retain its team and ensure they were in a good place mentally. The amount of support they offered was second to none," is just one of the comments given to Purple Cubed.

15 BANKSIDE HOTEL
In a nutshell A 161-bedroom hotel that is part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, but is independently owned
Location South Bank, London
Employees 60

Creativity is a huge part of the DNA of this hotel and it has always nurtured a working environment where employees can be themselves. As a result, the HR department has already built up a team of hospitality

professionals with high emotional intelligence, ensuring there is a strong people-focused company culture.

During the pandemic – and through to reopening – the focus was very much on the wellbeing of teams, with the HR department reminding everyone what special people they are and working to build their self-confidence through wellbeing and mental health initiatives. Mental health first-aiders ensured that all leaders and managers were trained to support employees' mental health.

"There were mental health workshops for all, reminding employees – or "Banksiders" – that this is a place where they are valued, cared for and, most of all, where they belong," says people and development manager Jenni Clarke.

With 97% of respondents to the Purple Cubed survey agreeing that they felt supported and informed throughout, it is clear the initiatives are appreciated.

16 SWITCH HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT
In a nutshell A management company run by entrepreneurs
Locations Park Regis Birmingham, Holiday Inn Express Birmingham, Nite Nite Birmingham and the Royal Angus hotel. The group has also expanded into serviced offices and residential developments, with two properties in Birmingham
Employees 75 at the time of the survey. Pre-Covid, 200. All management team retained



During lockdown, this independent company prioritised its staff by maintaining a full people strategy. "This has been a worthwhile investment as integrity is everything to us and it was important to ensure our team felt appreciated, looked after and developed, even if they weren't at work all the time," says group people director Emma Keeble.

It's reaped tangible rewards, with 98% of respondents to the Purple Cubed survey saying they have felt supported and informed.

The company already uses communication platforms such as Flow and Facebook, and these were invaluable tools, allowing managers to check-in with team members. They also invested in WellBee and continued with their engagement pulse surveys to gauge how the team were feeling.

Crucially, whenever there were any big decisions or announcements, the managing director and people director communicated these directly to every member of staff. "[This was] so they could understand we were learning and wanted their involvement," says Keeble.

17 GEORGIAN HOUSE
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 Pimlico, London
Employees 27

Hats off to a hotel that has been shortlisted every year since first entering six years ago, thanks to its continual quest to improve employee engagement through caring for and developing the team – even in the turbulent past year.

One particular comment in the Purple Cubed survey underlines this: “The company did its best to protect employees and guests and save as many jobs as possible, give constant updates and care for our mental health and wellbeing.”

As well as regular catch-up chats and virtual team meetings to explain changes and make those on furlough feel included, the company provided wellbeing sessions online, offering a space for the team to meet, catch up and discuss specific wellbeing-related topics.

Greenbelt projects and Umbrella apprenticeship training were also continued over Zoom sessions, and upskilling and training opportunities were offered to ensure everyone felt confident and ready to return to the hotel.

In the run-up to getting back to work, the family-run company embarked on a group fundraising challenge for Hospitality Action. This proved to be a great team-building opportunity, encouraging everyone to work together and get outdoors.

18 THE ATHENAEUM HOTEL & RESIDENCES
In a nutshell A five-red-AA-star, 111-bedroom hotel, part of the family-run Ralph Trustees hotel group
Location Piccadilly, London
Employees Undisclosed

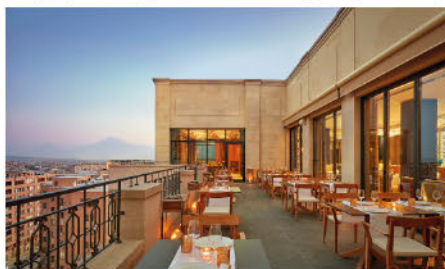
Throughout the pandemic, this company continued to invest in its team members by providing training, support and a regular, open line of communication. For instance, updates were posted on Workplace from Facebook, with staff also encouraged to post what they had been up to. And wellbeing was monitored through phone calls, allowing individuals the chance to ask questions.

To keep the team agile, there was an hour of training via Zoom every day to cross-train between departments. “Because of this, team members are now able to help one another in small but important ways, and so our whole team has grown closer,” says one respondent to the Purple Cubed survey.

The team clearly feel valued and fairly managed. “The hours were shared out equally when the company started to get busier,” explains one insider, “and they made sure there were plenty of procedures for our safety. The hotel has also done plenty for charity throughout, making for a proud place to work.”

Underlining this strong people culture, where the hotel had to make redundancies, each person was offered emotional support and coaching in CV writing and interview techniques to prepare them for the next step, and a leavers' network was set up to share any future vacancies at the hotel.

19 INTERSTATE HOTELS & RESORTS
In a nutshell A third-party hotel management company working with both independents and with brands such as IHG, Accor, Novotel, Autograph and Hilton
Locations Operates 99 hotels across the UK, and more than 25 properties across Europe and Russia
Employees 52 (growth of 32 during the pandemic)



There's a lot of pride in this workforce owing to how their employer handled the pandemic, with some 97% surveyed saying they were happy with the way they had been supported by the company during Covid and felt informed of changes and well-prepared for their return to work.

This impressive score is backed up by some of the comments given to Purple Cubed: “I've never worked in a business where such good care is taken of the staff... I look forward to the future years here,” was one comment.

Another said: “Wellbeing of team members was as important to Interstate as delivering the best service to our hotels and owners, and that has been very appreciated.”

Looking at the bigger picture, the company is about to launch an industry-leading chef apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with Babcock Training, offering the opportunity for more than 30 young people to join the industry and develop skills in an area of hospitality that has a shortage.

In addition, it has partnered with Only A Pavement Away to offer employment opportunities to vulnerable people who would not easily find stable permanent employment.

20 THE PIG AT BRIDGE PLACE
In a nutshell A restaurant with rooms with 29 bedrooms, including lodges and huts in the gardens, part of the seven-strong Pig group by Home Grown Hotels
Location Canterbury, Kent
Employees 92 (650 across all Pigs)

Another business that makes a regular appearance in this listing, the Pig at Bridge Place sees its employees as its greatest asset and clearly treats them as such. Not least, its commitment to their development is evident through a strong induction programme, front and back

of house apprenticeships, a Budding Entrepreneur scheme and in-hotel craft training in all departments.

Lockdown saw a real focus on communication and engagement, with regular video updates from chief executive Robin Hutson and a weekly programme set out with activities such as Tuesday management development sessions, which were open to everyone; Wet Wednesday, for drinks training and information; and Foodie Thursday, to set employees up with ideas and recipes to cook at home.

Asked by Purple Cubed what their experience of the past year was like, employees were resoundingly positive. Comments include: “They are like my family”, “I felt extremely safe when I did come back to work”, and “I've always felt well supported, valued and everyone is lovely, which is not something you get everywhere”.

21 THE ASSEMBLY HOUSE
In a nutshell A Grade I-listed Georgian townhouse with 11 (soon to be 15) luxury bedrooms, a restaurant, event spaces and the Richard Hughes Cookery School, managed by hospitality entrepreneurs Richard Hughes and Iain Wilson
Location Theatre Street, Norwich
Employees 58 (no change)



One of the directors logged onto the Purple Cubed feedback page to explain the company ethos of the past year: “I've tried to instil in the management team the need to keep in contact with all team members, informing them of the impact of closure. We've been open about the financial side of the operation, offering reassurance as to the security of their employment and financial help when needed.”

Judging by the team's comments, this strategy worked. “I feel really valued. I like that we have direct contact both formally and informally with senior managers,” was one notable remark.

Another highlighted that the company checked in on everyone's physical and mental health. “They also made us all smile with dance competitions and quizzes, while informing us about precautions to be taken on reopening. Phone numbers were being swapped in case you needed a chat day or night.”

In a normal year, popular team-building ideas include an annual Staff Wellness Month, with the chance to get free gym memberships, yoga and running clubs, free healthy eating cooking lessons, free stays in the hotel and a host of other events.

Best places to work 2021

22 CYCAS HOSPITALITY
In a nutshell A hotel management company founded in 2008, working with groups such as Accor, Hyatt, IHG, Marriott and Radisson

Location Some 27 hotels across the UK, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Belgium

Employees 65 in a central support role, with 500 team members, dubbed 'Cycadettes'



Every year, Cycas seems to come up with more people initiatives. Appreciating the impact of lockdown on people's home and working lives, it has teamed up with the Happiness Index to give employees the freedom to express opinions anonymously – from raising ideas or concerns to praising colleagues – via the Employee Voice 24/7 link.

It has also introduced a twice-yearly engagement survey to get a clear picture in real time of how each team is doing, what additional support people may need and general engagement levels. The culture team is then able to make changes to ensure everyone feels their feedback is being addressed.

With the company on track to have opened one hotel on average every month this year, it has revamped its recruitment and onboarding processes. All new-starter materials are online and the culture team has introduced engagement activities to ensure everyone feels connected with their fellow team members – even when they haven't met in person yet.

23 MILLENNIUM & COPTHORNE HOTELS AT CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB

In a nutshell The 231-bedroom hotel operates under the Millennium & Copthorne Hotels brand but is owned by Chelsea Football Club

Location In the grounds of Chelsea Football Club, London

Employees 82

None of the team were made redundant or furloughed last year, and the hotel has operated throughout, supporting the community and providing 10,500 room nights to NHS staff.

With the teams having to juggle work with other pressures during the pandemic, wellbeing has been put centre-stage, and managers have worked hard to ensure everyone is coping mentally and physically. For instance, the hotel stepped up its diversity and inclusion forums and checked on the wellbeing of its workforce via welfare calls. It has also offered staff free online workouts.

The comments gathered by Purple Cubed reveal morale has been high. "Staff members volunteered to help out in other departments, such as housekeeping, F&B and reception. We managed to operate a successful hotel without having to rely on agency staff," explains one member of staff.

And they have felt supported, too. "The company gave me the opportunity to manage my shifts with my kids and housework," says one.

Another comment that stood out is: "Management implemented and trained staff to be safe while serving guests. Everyone worked on full pay. We took care of each other."

24 BENNETT HAY
In a nutshell A privately owned bespoke hospitality services company

Location London

Employees 120

Last year saw further development of an online platform for employees facilitated by a "happiness officer". Initially launched to encourage teams to socialise, share knowledge and create a deeper connection with senior managers, it has proved an invaluable tool to offset daily stresses and to continue to learn and build relationships during lockdown.

Recent activities were aimed at improving people's wellbeing and mental health and to prepare the teams for a safe reopening through the #Spring campaign. These included #SpringUp wellbeing forums, virtual coffee mornings and mental health awareness initiatives; #SpringBack guest-centric training videos and photo-sharing series; and #SpringForward, brand education sessions.

The past year also saw the happiness officer at the centre of the FWDTogether initiative for those employees impacted by the pandemic and to support, mentor and train members of the team who had been made redundant or faced the prospect. As operations start to reopen, the company hopes to bring former colleagues back into the business and share vacancies on the FWDTogether community before advertising externally.

25 MAVERICK VENUES
In a nutshell An independent hospitality company managing weddings, meetings and events

Location Based in Leicestershire, with facilities also in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire

Employees Undisclosed

As well as being a multi-site operator of country house wedding and events venues, including Prestwold Hall and Hodsock Priory, Maverick also provides outside catering and event management through Maverick Outside for up to 1,000 guests – so you can imagine how severely its business was hampered last year.

Nevertheless, the company stepped up and ensured staff were well-protected and trained when they could work, and that they were kept well-informed when it wasn't possible.

"My company was extremely well-organised

while dealing with the pandemic. We put in place all the restrictions that were required to enable our guest to have a fabulous wedding," said one team member on Purple Cubed's feedback survey.

And there is a sense that the company really did go above and beyond for its people in this comment: "The team's wellbeing has stayed at the forefront of the company's mind even during a difficult year. I have had both emotional and financial support when needed along with regular updates on the company's situation with regards to Covid-19."

26 FARNCOMBE ESTATE
In a nutshell A privately owned 500-acre estate that is home to three award-winning hotels

Locations 39-bedroom Dormy House, eight-bedroom Foxhill Manor; 63-bedroom the Fish, all near Broadway, the Cotswolds

Employees 265 and growing (February 2020: 263)



Lockdown didn't halt people progress at Farncombe. Among the training initiatives, the HR team launched a bespoke apprenticeship programme called Generation Farncombe.

"As part of the development and engagement strategy, it made sense to develop the team while they had time on their hands during furlough, keeping them engaged and increasing skills and knowledge in preparation for reopening," says director of human resources Holly Glover.

It's been well-received, with 20 employees shortlisted to start level two, level three and level five apprenticeships – and has been a boon to the business itself. As lockdown comes to an end, the first cohort are nearing the end of their programmes and can put their ideas into action as they return to work. Plus, they are inspiring the next generation of apprentices.

The company has also offered online workshops and one-to-one coaching sessions, as well as positive feedback about the apprenticeship scheme and training generally. Purple Cubed's survey captured comments such as: "It's the only company I know that was prepared to pay full pay during lockdown."

27 **45 PARK LANE**
In a nutshell The Dorchester
 Collection's boutique five-red-AA-star,
 45-bedroom hotel
Location Park Lane, London
Employees 110



This hotel has a strong record of staff engagement, and this continued throughout lockdown when the leadership team led a 70km walk for Cruse UK, a charity that supports bereaved people. Nearly everyone got behind the effort, walking in their gardens, up and down stairs and around their neighbourhoods during the strictest lockdown to raise £1,890 – more than double the target of £700.

Online masterclasses and events have kept the teams connected and communication is high on the agenda. The general manager, for instance, hosts weekly updates and coffee meetings for all employees, supported by a weekly newsletter compiled by the leadership team.

As the luxury hotel gets back to normal, every employee is being welcomed back by the general manager with an update meeting and a presentation on what the hotel is now focusing on – and what is going to happen next.

The resounding feedback from employees in the Purple Cubed survey was that they have been made to feel supported. “Even before furlough was announced, the company sent a message to every employee to assure us that all our salaries and positions were guaranteed.”

28 **DALATA HOTEL GROUP**
In a nutshell The largest hotel
 operator in Ireland, operating under
 Maldron Hotels and Clayton Hotels brands, as
 well as managing a portfolio of Partner Hotels
Location More than 41 hotels under the Maldron
 and Clayton brands in Ireland and the UK, rising
 to 54 in the next two years
Employees 400 in UK (427 pre-Covid) 4,923 in total

Dalata's hotels remained open to support key workers, retaining 94% of its workforce. To step up staff engagement and support, the HR team increased its activity on the training portal Dalata Online, delivering 92,000 courses.

Other support platforms were added to give purpose, development, personal growth and reassurance to those on furlough. An Umbrella Wellness app provided wellbeing and the Alkimii Connect app kept everyone updated, offering support on news that came out from government and a supportive, virtual ear.

“Even with the disruption, our strategy of developing teams and promoting from within has remained unbowed, with 45 of those in the UK moving forward in their careers,” says regional HR manager UK Janine Simmons.

Investment in its people has ensured business success, and the company has announced three hotel openings in Dublin, Manchester and Brighton. Simmons adds “Our new opening hotels in Glasgow, and both properties in Manchester and Bristol, have realised the career growth of our senior team and created 200 additional jobs in the labour market.”

29 **RBH MANAGEMENT**
In a nutshell A UK-based independent
 hotel management company, operating
 more than 45 branded and unbranded hotels
Locations Hotels managed throughout the UK
 with head offices in Glasgow and London
Employees 85 (head office)

A real sense of family has developed in this company over the past 12 months through a mentality of being “in it together”. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the fact everyone agreed to a cut in salary to avoid making any redundancies.

“The company was clear on its mission not to lose anyone,” says one grateful respondent to the Purple Cubed survey. “At a time of uncertainty, I felt like the company has done [its] best to protect jobs and keep everyone updated,” says another.

The HR team came up with several virtual activities, including book clubs, wine clubs, RBH Crufts (with dog trick videos), indoor sports days (or ‘Winter Iso-lympics’) Guess Who?, chair yoga, ‘Step Aside Joe Wicks’ (a 10-minute weekly workout hosted by a senior manager) – and so on.

As things get back to normal, the company is taking a collaborative approach to work and is remaining flexible. One initiative that employees have asked to keep are the regular Microsoft Teams calls to check in on everyone and keep them engaged.

30 **RAPPORT GUEST SERVICES**
In a nutshell Provides high-quality
 guest services to many UK leading
 companies, including reception, concierge, client
 meeting room management, switchboard and
 other call services.

Locations UK and Ireland
Employees Undisclosed



During the pandemic, Rapport swiftly recognised its wellbeing strategy was more important than ever, because many employees were unable to be with their family and friends.

As with many companies, the managing director hosted weekly Zoom calls to reach out to everyone, but Rapport also ramped up its diversity and inclusion strategy by establishing the “Be You” network. It also formed a “Be Well Committee” to highlight national recognition days, share best practice and educate team members.

“We are committed to prioritising our employees’ wellbeing and have invested significantly in mental wellbeing, financial and emotional support for our employees to allow them to be the very best and happiest versions of themselves,” says head of HR Natasha Whitehurst.

A qualified nutritionist provides sessions for the frontline teams each week and Whitehurst reports that the Rapport choir has gone from strength-to-strength with Zoom collaborations.

The company has also doubled the number of mental health first-aiders across the business, to a ratio of one in 10 employees.

