



USE THEM, DON'T LOSE THEM!

Industry must do more to fully engage with universities and students. The benefits are considerable, says Adam Rowledge FIH SJS

The challenge to attract and retain talent is probably the biggest issue the industry faces. We all recognise we must do more to bring people into industry by any means possible, with a particular focus on getting into schools and captivating them at a young age.

By 2020 the number of people that we need to replace those leaving is estimated at a staggering 870,000, plus we will need a further 100,000 to fill new positions. There are many reasons people leave but it can't go unnoticed that significant numbers of UK hospitality graduates do not go on to secure employment in our industry.

So what can we do to ensure a higher conversion rate and maximise the number of people that are already showing an interest in a hospitality career? How should we engage with them to give them the best possible start - or as I heard another general manager put it recently, make sure that they're 'oven ready'!

Many universities offer a one-year industry placement as part of their courses. This gives employers a pipeline and a chance 'to try before you buy' as typically these students are in the second or third year of a four-year degree. By building a good relationship with them at this stage you can enhance the likelihood of them joining as a permanent colleague upon graduation. It's also a golden opportunity to provide an excellent experience of working in our industry to ensure that they are inspired to continue and also that they develop the skills, both hard and soft, that we need.

There are universities that offer mentoring programmes to their students who they match with industry figures who are well-suited to supporting them in their final year of studies and bridging what I'm sure



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can be a daunting few months between studying and employment. For those universities who do not have a specific programme, Springboard offers support in this way. This is obviously a critical step in ensuring that we don't lose talented people and that we give them the support that they need to be successful in their first role. It's also excellent practice to get them to buy in to the mentoring experience so that they can use this as a platform to both continue as a mentee on a programme such as the Institute's own Mentor Me programme and also to then become a mentor later in their career.

I have just been involved with a university where a team of four students undertook a research project on behalf of Georgian House. They looked at our recruitment challenges in the context of likely outcomes from Brexit. I was extremely impressed with the way that they approached the project and the output they created. Again, this was an excellent way to build relationships with students and faculty. By engaging in such a project you get input from the brightest young minds entering our industry who are solving real-life challenges for your business at essentially no cost. I'll certainly be implementing the recommendations put forward by the students.

Of course you can do none, some or all of the above but I think that we all recognise the need for a holistic approach to this major challenge. Not only can it be a benefit to employ students, but at a number of universities there is also the opportunity to explore research projects and executive education to further support your business and its training requirements.

In summary, I highly recommend that across all sectors of the industry we do more to engage with universities to further address the industry's biggest challenge.