



# People power

Could investing in their existing teams hold the key for operators struggling to recruit? Features editor **Lauren Fitchett** reports



Tracy Bickerdike, head of training at Star Pubs & Bars

**As pubs and bars weathered the turmoil of the pandemic, another challenge was hot on its heels: staff shortages.**

The usual flurry of resumé's dried up, hospitality vacancies hit new highs and opening hours were cut as venues struggled to get new recruits on board. But operators keen to bolster their workforce say focusing on training has yielded results.

In particular, the government's cash incentive for employees taking on apprentices – announced in the Budget last spring by chancellor Rishi Sunak and extended in October – is easing strain in some parts of the sector.

Licensees in England who employed a new starter between 1 October 2021 and the end of January can apply to register them as an apprentice until 15 May and claim back £3,000, regardless of age, on top of existing payments available for training an apprentice. The immediate benefits of new apprentices are clear – but the on-the-job training could make them as valuable in the long term.

Tracy Bickerdike, head of training at Star Pubs & Bars, says hospitality faces two key

obstacles: a lack of available staff to fill roles and an absence of career progression, which is often cited as a reason for those leaving the sector – but not enough operators are taking up the opportunities available, she says.

“Recruiting and training staff is a major issue for licensees,” Bickerdike explains. “Apprenticeships are great for this as they are suitable for all ages, existing and new members of staff.

“Offering employees the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications while learning on the job helps pubs to stand out from the competition. It also makes new staff more productive more quickly and encourages recruits to see hospitality as a career. The government's incentives are a real bonus, which unfortunately many aren't making use of. People think there's a catch, but there isn't.”

The incentives sit alongside the apprenticeship levy, paid for by employers with wage bills over £3m, which covers 95% of apprenticeship fees in England.

With the price tag of recruitment typically coming in at 20% of a position's annual ↻



# RECRUITMENT AND APPRENTICESHIPS

salary, training staff – whether through apprenticeships or internal schemes – can cut costs.

“By implementing training programmes and showing your staff a clear route to more senior positions, you can encourage more to view the hospitality industry as a viable, long-term career,” says Bickerdike. “It’s fantastic, I’ve seen people start out as kitchen porters and work their way up to become area managers through the right training opportunities.”

Nina Houston, owner of Star’s The New Inn in Middleton Cheney, near Banbury, agrees, adding: “I really believe in apprenticeships – I did one myself when I was 18 and currently have three staff members on different schemes. They manage most of the training directly with the apprenticeship company, which saves me a lot of time, and I’ve seen employees working in the business for longer and harder as a result. Customers like familiarity, so it’s a huge benefit to offer my staff training programmes that help them grow and help me keep them for longer.”

The Stonegate Group’s Accelerator Programme, a fast-track path to managerial positions, is an example of the results of internal training, marking its 30th graduation cycle in September.

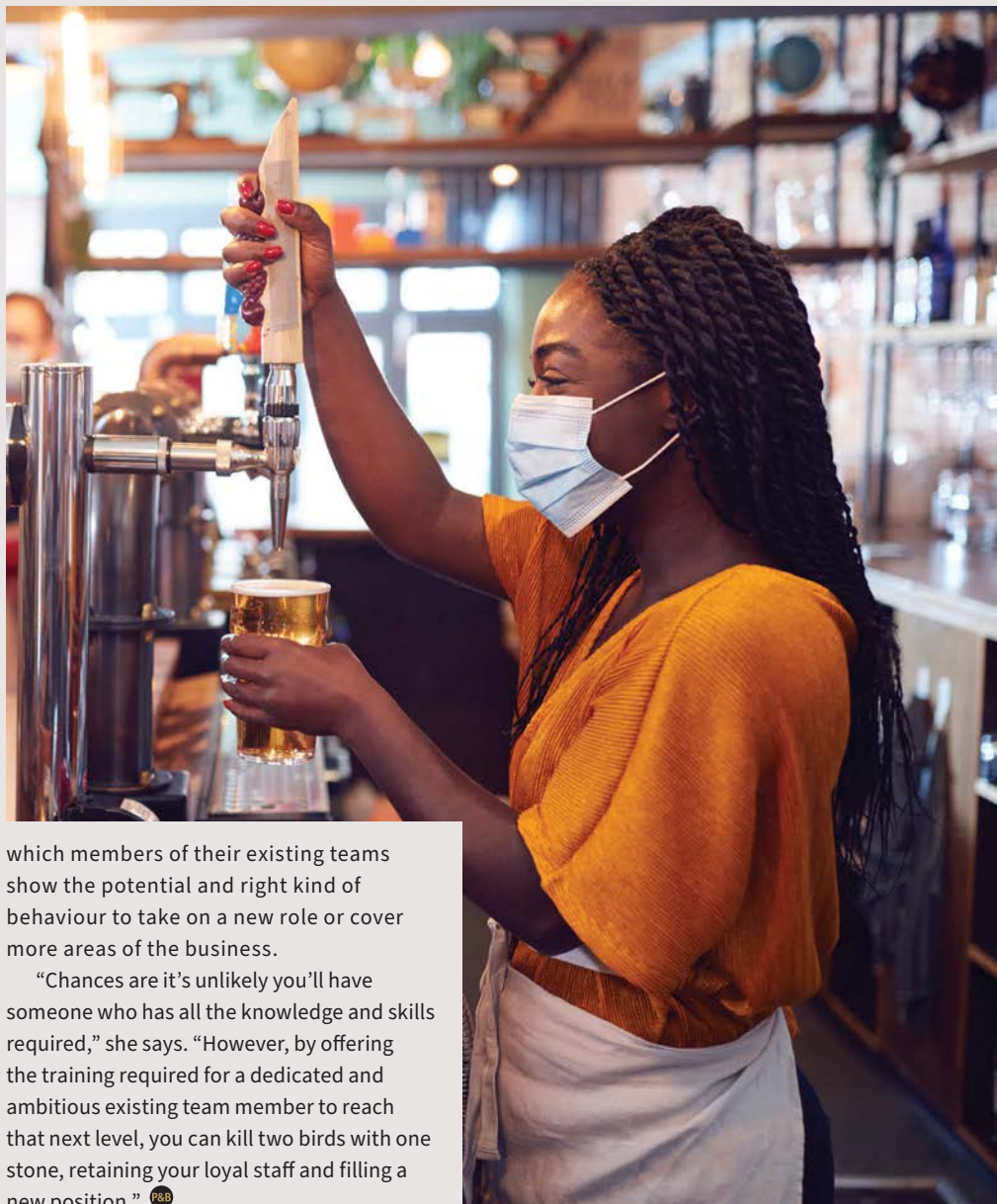
In January, Remit Training said it had worked with Stonegate to boost its chef recruitment, reducing turnover by 32% thanks to its back-of-house apprenticeship programme. Star has also joined forces with Remit to help licensees find and train apprentices, after a forum flagged that recruitment and retention were their biggest challenges.

Well-trained staff are more likely to be loyal to a business, Bickerdike explains, with ongoing training opening progression routes and making a work-life balance easier to find. A rounded workforce means less of a reliance on certain team members to take on particular responsibilities, opening up flexibility within the rota.

After all, lifestyle appeared to be key even before the pandemic focused our priorities – a 2018 survey by service provider Deputy and YouGov found 55% of hospitality workers would be less likely to leave if they had more control over shift patterns.

A multi-trained team also helps employees support each other during busy periods, such as when the kitchen is short-staffed and front of house staff are needed to step in.

As operators look to 2022 for a chance to rebuild, Bickerdike says now is the time to consider upskilling, by first looking at



which members of their existing teams show the potential and right kind of behaviour to take on a new role or cover more areas of the business.

“Chances are it’s unlikely you’ll have someone who has all the knowledge and skills required,” she says. “However, by offering the training required for a dedicated and ambitious existing team member to reach that next level, you can kill two birds with one stone, retaining your loyal staff and filling a new position.” 