

First Catering Rising Stars programme is huge success

Last year, the GCA launched its Catering Rising Stars programme aimed at garden centre catering staff



The programme, sponsored by Creed Foodservice and facilitated by Chris Brown from Turpin Smale Catering Consultants, was created to highlight and develop the talented individuals in garden centre restaurants and cafés and to recognise the important role catering plays in the industry.

We were inundated with applications, but 20 individuals from our member garden centres were chosen to take on four masterclasses to help improve their knowledge and experience of the industry.

The first two masterclasses covered topics such as financial control, what makes a good manager and food presentation. The third masterclass was a tour of Central London cafés, restaurants and coffee shops to inspire the candidates, and stretch their boundaries. The candidates were then whittled down to a top four.

Between masterclasses, the Rising Stars completed exercises on what they had learnt within their own garden centres and assessed the performance of their centres catering unit, trying out new ideas and evaluating the results. Candidates were trained in simple financial controls, food merchandising, innovations in the sector and how to present effectively.

For the fourth masterclass, the top four candidates had the opportunity to spend time in Creed's development kitchen with ex-England rugby captain, 2011 Celebrity MasterChef winner and non-executive director at Creed, Phil Vickery MBE. Vickery spent time showing the candidates his culinary skills and helped coach and prepare the top four to present at our conference.

The programme culminated in presentations made during our annual conference in January 2019 by the four chosen finalists: Louise Spinks from Ruxley Manor Garden

Centre, James Williams from Fron Goch Garden Centre, Ben Ryding from Haskins Garden Centre and Susie Jarrett from Tong Garden Centre. They all presented what they'd learnt throughout the process and conference delegates voted on a winner. Spinks was voted the winner by our delegates and we'd like to say a huge 'congratulations' to her and to the other finalists for making it so far in the process.

The programme was a huge success and feedback from our rising stars included them 'finding confidence' and 'learning new skills' thanks to the process.

"What stood out was the keenness and enthusiasm of those chosen," says Brown. "Hard working, often with many years' experience on catering's front line, they rose to the challenge of learning new financial and operational skills. The industry should be proud of every one of them."