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Sodexo Live! and Raymond Blanc welcome first recruits to apprentice academy

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Six new apprentices, aged 16 to 18, have been appointed and undergone their induction to a new apprentice academy, following news of its launch by Sodexo Live! and Michelin-starred chef Raymond Blanc OBE in February 2022.

The Sodexo Live! academy with Raymond Blanc was set up with the aim of discovering, fostering, and launching the next generation of chefs from the greater London area into rewarding careers in the kitchen.

To support the recruitment process, a welcome day was held in July, at which the apprentices and their parents met executive chefs and mentors from Sodexo Live! The event was hosted at Bateaux London, the company's river cruise dining experience. Here, they discussed their favourite foods, their reasons and drivers for wanting to become chefs, and their future goals.

The successful six apprentices then attended an induction day at the St Luke's Community Centre, South Islington in September. During the day they spent time with Sodexo Live! executive chefs Emeline Gibert and Alessandro Soro, and their chef training team from hospitality training and apprenticeships provider, HIT Training. The team and apprentices made chicken gyros for lunch, and at the end of the day, the apprentices were excited to receive their Sodexo Live! chef jackets. The apprentices are:

- Isaac Brown, aged 18
- George Hill, aged 17
- Lucy Gilbert, aged 16
- TJ Moore, aged 16
- Miracle Umunna, aged16
- Dreaquann Hall, aged 16

The academy was resourced in multiple ways. Three apprentices were hired after a successful taster day with HIT Training and Sodexo Live! in central London. Two were hired following impressive interviews after learning about the positions from relatives and recruiters. The last was hired following a successful work experience stint at a Sodexo Live! venue.

Ben Dutson, food innovation director, Sodexo Live! said: "The Sodexo Live! Academy is a great reminder of what it's like to enter this amazing industry at the start of your career and think how unattainable things like fine dining and cooking for tens of thousands of people, including senior royals, at iconic events like Royal Ascot seem in those early days.

"We want to spread the word about the fantastic experiences and opportunities available at Sodexo Live!, and we're hoping that this course will inspire the apprentices to pursue rewarding careers in the kitchen."

The Sodexo Live! Academy with Raymond Blanc is a structured culinary programme that will give the six apprentices the chance to achieve either a Commis Chef Level 2 or Level 3 Chef de Partie qualification.

The Academy will provide the apprentices with the opportunity to take part in major events, such as the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and Royal Ascot, as well as join the rotation around four Sodexo Live! London venues including the Royal Academy of Arts, the Wallace Collection, RAF Museum at Hendon, and Bateaux London.

The programme also involves a two-month stagiaire placement at Raymond Blanc's acclaimed hotel and restaurant in Oxfordshire, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, a Belmond Hotel. This stint will enable the apprentices the opportunity to develop their skills in fine dining.

Throughout the stagiaire placement, the apprentices will stay close to Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. They will have access to a mentor on-site and the assistance of the Sodexo early careers team for additional support throughout.

Upon completion of the Academy, apprentices will be eligible for permanent culinary roles within Sodexo Live!

Clare Johnson, early careers lead, Sodexo UK and Ireland, said: "It makes me incredibly proud to see the impact this course has already made on the apprentices. I've been on this journey with them from the beginning, from the day they received their GCSEs to the day of their induction, and I can't believe how much they've already accomplished. I'm excited to see what they achieve over the coming year and beyond."

Rebecca Kane Burton, CEO Sodexo Live!, UK and Ireland added: “Sodexo is passionate about developing people through apprenticeships, and we are delighted to welcome these six apprentices. What a phenomenal opportunity – thanks to Raymond’s incredible support – the apprentices will get a unique chance to work alongside a highly respected chef. They’ll also see first-hand the amazing career opportunities we can offer them in Sodexo Live! within an array of hospitality services including sport, events and cultural venues.

“Globally Sodexo Live! has around 250 people training within our teams, and every year Ecole Lenotre in Paris welcomes some 1,000 students from all over the world. Engaging and developing new talent is something Sodexo Live! is committed to because it is all about building the future of our industry.”