

Mystery diners to rate service at restaurants

A firm in Bath is at the centre of a drive to check whether food businesses up and down the country are keeping the customer satisfied.

The Mystery Dining Company, which specialises in undercover food and drink visits, has been appointed to work alongside the National Skills Academy for Hospitality to evaluate customer service across the hospitality sector in England.

The seven-year-old firm, which has more than 2,500 mystery assessors on its books, will work with the government body to create a system to assess and rank the performance of the country's restaurants, cafes, takeaways and hotels for the way they interact with their customers.

The firm, which is based in the city centre, will co-ordinate a range of surprise visits as well as providing in-depth analysis of industry trends.

Its reports will then be used by the academy to help create a benchmarking system for customer service and to develop training programmes.

Director Steven Pike said the appointment was the result of his own company's unwavering commitment to the hospitality sector.

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"The partnership with the National Skills Academy for Hospitality evolved naturally.

"When the Mystery Dining Company was established in 2003 we made a decision to stick to what we knew – food, drink and hospitality.

"This focus has helped us to become experts in our field and to build a network of mystery assessors who understand what it takes to deliver and receive excellent customer service when dining out."

Its team already visits about 1,000 premises a month for existing clients.

He said the benchmarking system would be an important tool, particularly for independent food and drink outlets.

Academy chief executive David McHattie added: "This partnership with the Mystery Dining Company has established a clear focus on promoting best practices in terms of customer interaction.



SECRET SERVICE: Some of the assessors used by the company

"Our emphasis with this benchmarking activity is on celebrating good performance and real stories captured from the reports to showcase positive industry examples of excellent customer service."

The academy was set up two years ago and forms part of the Government's National Skills Strategy, and aims to highlight leaders and identify excellence within the industry.