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Grosvenor House London

THE JUDGES

Stephen Boxall,
general manager,
the Ritz

Nuno Cesa de Sa,
operations manager,
Rudding Park

Zoe Jenkins,
director of operations,
Cowarth Park, the
Dorchester Collection

Fiona MacFarlane,
conference and
banqueting manager,
the Royal Garden hotel

David Morgan-Hewitt,
managing director,
the Goring hotel

Nick Scade, chief
executive officer,
Academy of Food
& Wine Service

In the past 12 months the conference and banqueting team at Grosvenor House have faced challenges that might have daunted lesser teams – yet they not only coped, they even managed to improve their performance.

As one of the biggest venues in London, the Grosvenor regularly hosts high-profile events. However, in the past year, as well as the usual strains of providing five-star service, the team had to work around a £3m overhaul of the banqueting kitchens, a change in the diary management system, the introduction of a new labour management tool, two separate office moves, an upgrade of its F&B ordering system, plus the introduction of new uniforms for all staff. Last but not least, the hotel was rebranded as JW Marriott.

It was to the department's credit, then, that they successfully hosted media-grabbing events such as the BAFTA film party, the Cateys, the Empire Film awards, the Q awards, the Galaxy British Book awards, the AA Hospitality awards and the Nationwide Mercury Prize.

The kitchen brigade deserves special mention. During most of last year's banqueting season they produced fine-dining-standard food despite the fact the main production kitchen was closed for refurbishment.

What has also stood out is the team's ability to be flexible and supportive of each other in the face of all these challenges.

And despite the turbulence of the past 12 months, the team still found time to back several charities. For instance, in January more than 50 staff volunteered to host the London Taxi Drivers Fund Mad Hatters Tea Party for more than 700 underprivileged and disabled children.

What the judges said...

● "Conference and banqueting is one of the most challenging departments in any hotel. There are so many opportunities for mistakes and client's expectations are higher than ever. This Hotel Catey, to my mind, is therefore probably the hardest to win."

*David Morgan-Hewitt,
managing director, the Goring hotel*

● "The Grosvenor House is a deserving winner, having undergone huge transformations both front and back of house in the past year. They put service and standards central to their team and prove that being the biggest is not enough – they still want to be the best."

Fiona MacFarlane, conference and banqueting manager, the Royal Garden hotel

THE SHORTLIST

Donnington Valley Hotel & Spa, Berkshire

Grosvenor House, A JW Marriott Hotel, London

The Berkeley, London

FORMER WINNERS

2007 Fiona MacFarlane, conference and banqueting manager of the year, the Royal Garden hotel

2008 Rudding Park, Harrogate