



# The chef shortage: A solvable crisis?

Understanding why we have a chef shortage and how it can be addressed



## Foreword



The chef shortage continues to create much debate in the sector. It is a major headache for many businesses and something that employers commonly feel they have little control over.

This latest research shows that the chef shortage is a result of many of the same external factors we identified in our report – **The Performance and Talent Management Revolution**. Yet, as we highlighted in that research, there are many things the sector can do to alleviate the shortage and we are seeing increasing numbers of businesses taking fresh approaches to do just that.

We have plenty of valuable initiatives to call on, such as Springboard's Future Chef, the Royal Academy of Culinary Art's Adopt a School and the Saturday Morning Chef Academy sponsored by the Geoffrey Harrison Foundation; to name but a few. Yet we could achieve so much more if we took a joined up approach across the sector as a whole, avoided duplication and maximised the impact from these fantastic initiatives.

We can also harness the new apprenticeships, which sector employers have developed to reflect their skills needs and raise professionalism. Here we have a real opportunity to grow and support the emerging talent.

We hope this research provides the essential evidence base to stimulate debate and collective action. Join us on this critical journey by visiting: [www.people1st.co.uk/chef-shortage](http://www.people1st.co.uk/chef-shortage)

### Simon Tarr

Chief Executive, People 1st

**This research was undertaken by Martin-Christian Kent, Executive Director of People 1st, and is based on interviews with 48 businesses, including:**

Adnams, Amaris, Artillery Tower, Balloo Inns, Blue Arrow, Bourne Leisure, Browns Hotel, Café Spice Namaste, Casual Dining Group, Caterer.com, Celtic Manor Hotel, Chef Jobs UK, Compass Group, D&D Restaurants, Doncaster College, Drake and Morgan, Ei Group, Handmade Burger Company, Harbour and Jones, Harrison Catering, Hilton, Kew Green Hotels, HIT Training, James Street South, IHG, Kendal College, Jamie Oliver Restaurants, JD Wetherspoon, Marriott, Merlin, Orcinus Recruitment, Peter Backman, Q Hotels, Quo Vadis, RAC Club, Red Carnation Hotels, The Restaurant Group, Royal Academy of Culinary Arts, Recruitment and Employment Confederation, SA Brain & Co Ltd, Sheraton Hotels & Resorts, South Downs College, TGI Fridays, Thornyhill Restaurant, Trinity Restaurant, University College Birmingham, Wahaca and Why Recruitment.

# Introduction

The chef shortage is a fundamental challenge for hospitality businesses and continues to receive significant media coverage in the trade and national press. However, it is generally viewed in isolation to the wider people-related challenges facing the hospitality sector.

In reality, as this research shows, it's a high-profile symptom of the broader issues we have recently highlighted in our report looking at people and productivity in the sector – **The Performance and Talent Management Revolution**. This found that hospitality businesses are having to adapt to a tighter, more competitive labour market, rising costs and changing employee attitudes. As a result, they are placing much more emphasis on interventions to increase staff retention, engagement and progression.

If the chef shortage is to be addressed effectively, there needs to be fresh thinking around a range of issues, and this is what makes solving it so problematic. There is no silver bullet. The root causes are varied and solutions need to be broad and complementary.

We hope that the evidence in this report helps to stimulate debate and galvanise collective action. It brings together a range of new and existing data, together with the views of head chefs and key businesses across the sector, industry commentators, students, learning providers and recruitment agencies to answer four key questions:

1. **What is the extent of the chef shortage?**
2. **What is causing the shortage?**
3. **What's the impact of the shortage?**
4. **What needs to be done to address the shortage?**

The chef shortage is not inevitable but, as hospitality businesses are beginning to rethink their wider people strategies, there needs to be a fundamental change in the approach the sector takes to address it. <sup>1</sup>

The shortage is typically presented in dire terms, which is understandable given its impact on the sector, but there are plenty of examples of good practice that can be built on and expanded to help businesses move forward. We explore some of these in section four of this report.

We would like to thank everyone that contributed to this research for their time and openness. There are many conflicting views as to the causes of the chef shortage and its possible solutions, but one thing that has been consistent is people's passion for the subject, the pride of becoming a chef and their determination that a solution can be found.

We hope this report reflects that passion and contributes to finding the solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Performance and talent management revolution (2017), People 1st

# Section one: What is the extent of the chef shortage?

## Introduction

Much has been written about the chef shortage, but how bad is it and how much worse is it than in the past?

This section looks at a range of evidence to better understand the extent of the shortage, the type of chefs it is affecting and its geographical dimension.

## Chefs and skill shortages

Our interviews with human resources professionals consistently found that chefs are the most challenging occupation to recruit for.

*“ I think it’s got harder. It’s never been easy to find talent, it’s never been easy to find chefs, but I think the chef side is getting even harder. It doesn’t get easier. ”* – Hotel operator

*“ I don’t know if a single [chef] team has been fully staffed this year. I think every team needs at least a position, or two. To put that into figures, about 10% under-manning is probably about standard. ”*  
– Recruitment agency

As of 2015 (the last available Employer Skill Survey), a quarter of hospitality businesses had vacancies, **22%** of which were for chefs. Out of those employers, **38%** considered their vacancies hard to fill; **36%** of them were for chef roles.

When it comes to reasons for hard-to-fill vacancies, **64%** report that they can’t find applicants with the required skills. Of those hospitality employers facing this issue, just under half (**45%**) said they couldn’t find skilled chefs.

Operational front-of-house roles, such as waiting and bar staff, account for the majority of other reported skill shortages.<sup>2</sup> However, employers see chefs as a particular challenge as the skilled nature of the role means there is a smaller labour pool to recruit from.



of which were  
for chefs

<sup>1</sup> National Employer Skill Survey (2015), UKCES/People 1st analysis

<sup>2</sup> These figures provide a useful indication of the demand for chefs but, as with recruitment process, online or via other means, businesses can post the same vacancies in numerous locations. Similarly, it fails to capture those businesses that advertise vacancies by word of mouth.

## Posted vacancies

An analysis of figures from Labour Insights, which collects millions of UK job postings from over **6,000** online sources, shows the extent of the demand for chefs and how it has changed over the past five years.<sup>3</sup> Table 1.1 shows the number of UK chef vacancies posted online between 2012 and 2017.

The figures suggest that the demand for chefs rose by **11%** between 2012 and 2016, with an overall increase of **8,313** in the number of posts advertised.

There are also a number of geographical differences across the UK. Whilst demand in England has risen, there was a significant drop in 2014. This was also seen in Scotland and Wales. The number of posted vacancies in England between 2012 and 2016 increased by **10%**.



In both Scotland and Wales, posted vacancies increased by **17%** between 2012 and 2016 although both nations have seen annual fluctuations in demand.

Northern Ireland has seen the biggest increase in vacancies, up **150%** over the same four-year period. Demand increased significantly in 2015, before falling slightly in 2016.

The 2017 figures only cover the period from January to June but, if the demand remains constant throughout the remainder of the year, the final figure would be in the region of **116,000**. This would represent an increase of **57%** in posted vacancies across the whole of the UK since 2012.

**Table 1.1: Number of online vacancies posted for chefs (2012-2017)**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
England	66,592	58,713	49,011	69,454	73,538	52,035
Scotland	3,583	4,315	3,196	5,293	4,184	2,656
Wales	1,549	1,345	923	1,799	1,739	852
Northern Ireland	380	313	616	1,111	952	417
<b>Total</b>	<b>74,116</b>	<b>66,699</b>	<b>55,760</b>	<b>79,672</b>	<b>82,429</b>	<b>57,977</b>

Source: Labour Insight Software, Federation for Industry Sector Skills & Standards

## Types of roles advertised

Looking at the specific roles being advertised, the biggest demand is simply for ‘chefs’, which could both reflect the generic demand for a chef to fill multiple roles as well as for a chef de partie.

During the interviews for this research, finding chefs de partie consistently emerged as the biggest recruitment challenge facing employers. However, there is also a large demand for more senior roles, such as sous and head chefs.

*“ I think we’re very good at bringing chefs in on a junior, apprentice or trainee level and getting trainees interested in becoming chefs. But if we need to recruit at chef de partie, junior sous chef or sous chef level, that’s when it becomes quite difficult.”*

– Hotel operator

Between 2012 and 2016, the number of posted vacancies for ‘chef’ increased by **22%**, compared to **64%** for sous chef roles and **33%** for head chef roles.

### Between 2012 and 2016



Table 1.2: Number of online vacancies posted for specific chef roles (2012-2017)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Chef</b>	38,081	35,660	30,328	45,954	46,648	29,559
<b>Sous chef</b>	15,887	15,164	14,829	23,531	25,255	16,719
<b>Head chef</b>	12,196	11,016	11,078	16,721	16,228	9,847
<b>Chef manager</b>	2,213	1,908	1,579	2,482	2,250	1,400
<b>Executive chef</b>	679	512	559	877	841	459
<b>Commis chef</b>	200	163	170	191	544	665
<b>Kitchen assistant</b>	127	176	152	155	135	129
<b>Executive sous chef</b>	118	99	59	101	135	71
<b>Kitchen supervisor</b>	105	124	90	172	183	128

Source: Labour Insight Software, Federation for Industry Sector Skills & Standards

Other data also shows the extent of the challenge. Figures from recruitment consultants Blue Arrow in July 2017 showed that, in the previous 90 days, there were **5,589** vacancies for permanent chefs, **825** for temporary chefs and **350** for contract chefs.<sup>4</sup>

Figures from hospitality's biggest online job site, Caterer.com, also provide a useful picture of the demand and supply for specific chef roles. Their figures show the number of job posts and applications for 2016, and from January to September 2017.

As would be expected, the number of job posts and applications vary considerably by month. However, comparing figures from January to September 2016 to the same period in 2017, we can see that the number of posts has increased slightly, as have the number of applications.

Simplistically speaking, there were **15** applications for every job post in the first nine months of 2016, which rose to **18** for the same period in 2017. The increased applications may reflect the growing turnover of existing chefs.

There were **15 applications** for every job post in the first nine months of 2016, which **rose to 18** for the same period in 2017



Table 1.3: Job posts and application for chef vacancies

	Job posts		Job applications		Job posts	Job applications
	2016	2017	2016	2017	% difference	
January	946	1,049	22,166	27,521	11%	24%
February	877	1,309	21,423	25,297	49%	18%
March	965	1,307	21,273	27,010	35%	27%
April	1,046	1,151	20,411	19,293	10%	-5%
May	1,412	1,598	20,693	20,440	13%	-1%
June	1,470	1,402	16,122	18,146	-5%	13%
July	1,214	1,422	19,000	14,668	17%	-23%
August	1,751	1,522	20,259	18,110	-13%	-11%
September	1,688	674	17,575	9,414	-60%	-46%
October	1,854	-	21,511	-	-	-
November	1,350	-	20,447	-	-	-
December	788	-	15,861	-	-	-
Total	13,396	-	236,741	-	-	-
Total from Jan-Sept	11,369	11,434	178,922	179,899	-14%	1%

Source: Caterer.com

<sup>4</sup> Hospitality and Catering figures (July 2017), Blue Arrow

The Caterer.com figures for commis chef vacancies show that, while the number of jobs posted between January and September increased from 2016 to 2017, the number of applications fell, from an average of **16** per job in 2016 to **11** in the same period in 2017.

**Table 1.4: Job posts and application for commis chef vacancies**

	Job posts		Job applications		Job posts	Job applications
	2016	2017	2016	2017	% difference	
January	412	503	10,753	10,966	22%	2%
February	441	555	10,250	10,172	27%	-1%
March	426	668	8,497	10,682	49%	26%
April	493	625	8,449	7,543	25%	-11%
May	519	625	7,701	7,469	18%	-3%
June	600	1,120	7,043	7,329	101%	4%
July	517	713	7,062	5,550	34%	-21%
August	582	1,164	6,925	7,398	95%	7%
September	612	663	7,438	4,894	9%	-34%
October	555	-	8,175	-	-	-
November	540	-	7,454	-	-	-
December	411	-	6,366	-	-	-
Total	4,378	-	96,113	-	-	-
Total from Jan-Sept	4,602	6,636	74,118	72,003	44	-3%

Source: Caterer.com

A similar picture can be seen for chef de partie vacancies – posted vacancies increased, while the number of applications dropped slightly. In the first **nine** months of 2016 there were **nine** applications for every vacancy. This fell to **eight** in the same period of 2017.

Table 1.5: Job posts and application for chef de partie vacancies

	Job posts		Job applications		Job posts	Job applications
	2016	2017	2016	2017	% difference	
January	2,087	2,168	31,195	31,428	4%	1%
February	2,044	2,152	27,215	27,782	5%	2%
March	2,198	2,520	24,317	26,671	15%	10%
April	2,410	2,457	22,141	21,230	2%	-4%
May	2,465	2,712	19,928	20,349	10%	2%
June	2,479	2,874	17,187	17,106	16%	0%
July	2,373	2,832	16,602	13,673	19%	-18%
August	2,644	2,829	17,608	17,569	7%	0%
September	2,542	1,566	17,380	9,023	-38%	-48%
October	2,461	-	20,819	-	-	-
November	2,299	-	21,244	-	-	-
December	1,594	-	18,155	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,596</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>253,791</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total from Jan-Sept</b>	<b>21,242</b>	<b>22,110</b>	<b>193,573</b>	<b>184,831</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-5%</b>

Source: Caterer.com

Finally, looking at head chef positions, we can see that the number of job posts and applications have both increased. However, the number of posted vacancies continues to exceed the number of applications. This is likely to reflect the fact that head chefs are less likely to use an online job board and apply for posts through word of mouth.



Table 1.6: Job posts and application for head chef vacancies

	Job posts		Job applications		Job posts	Job applications
	2016	2017	2016	2017	% difference	
January	33,293	39,854	11,065	14,198	20%	28%
February	30,045	36,277	10,531	12,792	21%	21%
March	29,051	36,415	10,137	13,022	25%	28%
April	27,513	27,553	9,205	10,124	0%	10%
May	25,330	28,141	8,957	9,820	11%	10%
June	24,188	26,306	8,825	9,821	9%	11%
July	23,062	25,020	8,775	9,521	8%	9%
August	25,190	26,368	8,976	9,402	5%	5%
September	26,055	-	9,352	-	-	-
October	26,110	-	9,834	-	-	-
November	27,361	-	10,356	-	-	-
December	23,498	-	8,841	-	-	-
Total	320,696	-	114,854	-	-	-
Total to September	243,727	245,934	85,823	88,700	1%	3%

Source: Caterer.com

What these figures do reinforce is the difficulty that many businesses are having in filling commis roles.

There are fewer applications for these positions compared to chef de partie roles, which appears to confirm that chefs who would traditionally have applied for commis positions are being considered for chef de partie positions as a result of the skill shortage.

This, in turn, is fuelling the number of chefs progressing their careers without the requisite skillsets, creating an unsustainable bubble of chefs in roles that they have insufficient skills and knowledge to perform.

## A global phenomenon

The chef shortage is often seen as solely a UK problem, but many countries are facing similar challenges.

Across the rest of Europe, there is evidence of chef shortages in The Netherlands, Germany and France. In France, despite the fact that unemployment is at **9.6%**, chefs were considered to be the third most difficult position to fill, followed by domestic help and engineers.<sup>5</sup>

Further afield in the United States, the Bureau of Labour Statistics estimate that the US hospitality industry will need an additional **200,000** line cooks and chefs by 2025.

A similar picture emerges in Canada. Figures from Tourism HR Canada estimate that **23,500** additional chefs will be needed between 2015 and 2035 – yet it estimates that **9,000** of these jobs will go unfilled.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lefigaro.fr/emploi/2015/04/16/09005-20150416ARTFIG00159-il-y-a-17-million-de-postes-a-pouvoir-en-france.php>

In Australia, the Australian National Tourism Labour Force Survey found that chefs were among the top five occupations projected to have the biggest skill shortages. More than **38,000** chefs are currently needed across Australia.

New Zealand is experiencing a similar shortage. The New Zealand Tourism Industry Association estimates that another **6,000** chefs will be required by 2025 and believes it is the biggest skill shortage facing the hospitality sector.

## Summary

In this section we have explored the extent of chef vacancies; in particular, the number of hospitality employers who are identifying chefs as a difficult role to fill and the fact that there are insufficient numbers of applicants with the required skills.

Figures from various sources highlight the high number of vacancies and the evidence suggests that, whilst they fluctuate annually, they have continued to rise since 2011. A particular challenge with the chef shortage, which partly explains the impact it is having on businesses, is that it is not limited to specific chef positions. Instead, it is affecting all levels of chefs and most areas of the UK.

The chef shortage is a global problem, and it's not only limited to the UK. In the next section we look the factors underlying the shortage.



# Section two: What is causing the chef shortage?

## Introduction

The chef shortage is often seen simply as a problem of insufficient demand to meet a growing supply. The reality is more complex.

In this section we focus on six factors, all of which are contributing to the chef shortage:



1. Increased demand for chefs



2. The changing nature of chef roles



3. A shrinking labour pool



4. Too few chef apprentices entering the sector



5. Too few full-time chef students entering and staying in the sector



6. The changing nature of chef turnover and chefs leaving the profession



## Increased demand for chefs

In 1971, a study for the Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board estimated that there were **54,000** chefs, cooks and butchers working in the hotel and catering industry across Great Britain.<sup>6</sup>

Today, there are approximately **235,220** chefs alone working in the hospitality sector and **325,483** across the economy as a whole in the UK.

As table 2.1 shows, the number of chefs and cooks working in the sector increased by **51,919** between 2011 and 2016, with the largest increase found in the restaurant industry. However, it's worth bearing in mind that the increased blurring between pubs and restaurants is likely to underestimate the number of chefs in the pub industry and inflate those in the restaurant industry.

**Table 2.1: Number of chefs and cooks working in the hospitality sector (2011-2016)**

Hospitality industries	2011			2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
Hotels	24,942	2,200	27,142	28,076	308	28,384
Restaurants	79,938	21,021	100,958	120,657	25,644	146,301
Pubs and bars	21,503	4,999	25,869	16,132	3,663	19,796
Food and service management businesses	17,332	8,537	26,502	25,902	11,298	37,200
<b>Hospitality industry total</b>	<b>144,674</b>	<b>37,644</b>	<b>183,990</b>	<b>194,064</b>	<b>41,855</b>	<b>235,919 <sup>7</sup></b>

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics/People 1st analysis

<sup>6</sup> Chivers, T (1971) Study of Chefs and Cooks for the Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board

<sup>7</sup> Note: The total for hospitality includes parts of the sector, such as youth hostels, that do not fall within the four main industries



These figures reflect the sector’s ongoing growth in terms of new business, with the biggest expansion found in the restaurant industry, especially mainstream branded restaurants.

Anyone time-travelling from 1971 would struggle to recognise today’s hospitality sector – its range and variety, its ability to respond to and stimulate the changing demands of a sophisticated client base and, above all, its quality and international reputation.

Figures from 2016 show that we are spending more of our disposable income on eating out than ever before, with the average person spending just over **£45** a week on restaurants and hotels.<sup>8</sup> Many towns and cities are being revitalised through their hospitality, leisure and retail offers and certain areas of the UK, such as Northern Ireland, have seen a massive transformation in their food offer. Belfast, in particular, is fast becoming a popular destination for eating out.

Figures for the number of enterprises in the sector mask some of the critical trends that have had an impact on workforce numbers (see table 2.2). Whilst the overall number of hospitality enterprises has fallen, the trend in the hotel, restaurant and contract food service management industries has seen larger businesses expanding, at the expense of smaller operators.

Similarly, whilst the pub, bar and nightclub sectors have contracted severely in the past five years, the proportion of pubs offering food has increased, thereby increasing demand for chefs.

**Table 2.2: Number of enterprises by hospitality industry (2011-2016)**

Sectors (business demography)	2011	2016	% difference
Hotels and similar accommodation	10,810	9,595	-11%
Restaurants	80,825	82,285	2%
Food and service managers	10,345	10,070	-3%
Pubs, bars and nightclubs	51,085	39,020	-24%
Hospitality industry total	159,695	148,020	-7%

Source: Business Demography Survey, Office for National Statistics/People 1st analysis

**“ There are more and more openings, more than ever before, and they all require chefs. They all require skilled members of the teams to join them. The offer is fairly similar across the board. Even those that are offering good salaries and opportunities are still struggling, there’s that few people.”**  
**– Recruitment agency**

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/bulletins/familyspendingintheuk/financialyearendingmarch2016>

The United States has seen a similar increase in restaurant openings. Between 2005 and 2014, there was estimated to have been a **25%** growth in the number of restaurants.<sup>9</sup>

There has been an increase in the number of people working as chefs outside the hospitality sector too, with the biggest growth in education, health and retail.

**Table 2.3: Number of chefs and cooks working across the economy as a whole (2011-2015)**

Sectors	Number of chefs and cooks	
	2011	2016
Manufacturing	3,970	8,123
Retail	9,143	14,239
Hospitality	182,317	235,919
Financial and insurance activities	869	696
Administration and support services	731	811
Public administration and defence	3806	2,470
Education	22,512	28,321
Health and social work	29,378	35,368
Arts, entertainment and recreation	4,843	3,914
Other sectors	2,426	1,443
<b>Total</b>	<b>259,995</b>	<b>331,303</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics/People 1st analysis

The percentage growth in the number of chefs working in the hospitality sector is broadly consistent across England, Scotland and Wales, which have all seen an increase of **29%**. The percentage increase is slightly smaller in Northern Ireland, at **22%**.

**Table 2.4: Number of chefs and cooks working in the hospitality sector across the UK home nations (2011-2016)**

Hospitality industries	2011			2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
England	122,598	31,500	154,097	165,218	34,586	199,804
Scotland	14,239	2,030	16,269	17,453	3,602	21,055
Wales	3,772	2,365	6,137	6,152	1,778	7,931
Northern Ireland	4,065	1,750	5,815	5,240	1,889	7,130

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics/People 1st analysis

<sup>9</sup> www.chicagotribune.com/dining – viewed 3 March 2017

Data that shows the difference in the number of chefs between 2011 and 2016 across the English regions is unavailable but, as of 2016, the regions with the most chefs were London, the North West and the South East.

**Table 2.5: Number of chefs and cooks working in the hospitality sector across the English regions (2016)**

Hospitality industries	2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
North East	7,465	1,644	9,109
North West	29,295	6,359	35,654
Yorkshire and The Humber	10,390	3,939	14,329
East Midlands	11,737	2,214	13,951
West Midlands	15,813	979	16,791
East of England	18,761	3,045	21,806
London	36,992	6,054	43,047
South East	25,927	6,308	32,235
South West	8,840	4,044	12,884

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics/People 1st analysis

## The changing nature of chef roles

Whilst the number of people working as chefs has increased, the growing diversity of the hospitality industry means there is far more variation in the roles chefs are undertaking and, critically, the different skills and knowledge they are using.

So, when we talk about a shortage of chefs, what kind of chefs are we referring to?

Distinguishing different types of chef by the skills they use is a challenge, given the huge diversity of cuisine and concepts across the sector. To help simplify it, it's helpful to look at two different classifications of chef: classical and production chef.

- **A classical chef** requires a broad range of preparation and cooking skills, knowledge and competence to undertake their role. They are likely to be working solely or mainly with fresh ingredients but, even if they use some pre-prepared ingredients, they are still required to know how to prepare and cook from scratch.<sup>10</sup>
- **A production chef** requires a limited range of culinary skills, as dishes are largely pre-prepared. Dishes therefore need to be reheated or cooked (mainly using a limited number of cooking techniques). Production chefs are required to produce food in large volumes and adhere to standard presentation templates.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This is sometimes referred to as a 'professional' chef, which can draw unfair comparisons with production chefs, who may therefore be seen as less professional. In reality, whilst they share some similar competences, they are often very different occupations.

<sup>11</sup> We have used the term 'production' to reflect the title and scope of the new apprenticeship standards. However, production chef is also sometimes used to describe the more limited role of a chef working in a larger food operation. Throughout this report will be using the broader definition.

Within each classification, there is often a kitchen hierarchy depending on the size and style of the business. For example, titles such as commis chef, chef de partie, sous chef and head chef traditionally reflect the different roles of a classical chef. Some production chefs may also have traditional chef titles, or instead use terms such as a junior or senior chef.

Neither classification is limited to a particular type of cuisine or industry, so chefs specialising in European, Asian or Oriental or another cuisine could fall under either chef classification.

Some hospitality businesses may also use the term 'team member'. This role is generally found in quick service restaurants and, whilst it's not a chef role, it has responsibility for cooking, assembling and presenting food. This report is not directly focused on team members.

## Understanding the nature of the skill shortage

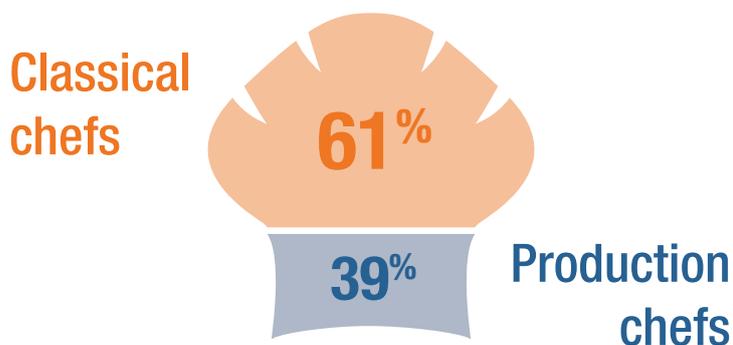
Official labour market classifications distinguish between cooks and chefs, but this distinction isn't fully reflected in the labour market, where the terms cook and chef are sometimes used interchangeably and don't distinguish between classical and production chefs.

We've put our labour market data through Peter Backman's Market Modeller, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the market, to better understand the proportion of chefs that break down as classical and production chefs.

Peter Backman's model calculates the number of units in each sub-sector of the hospitality industry, allowing us to estimate how many chefs we would expect to see in each unit and multiply it by the number of establishments in that sub-sector.

Whilst calculating different occupational profiles in this way is not an exact science, the Market Modeller does provide us with a robust tool that combines alternative measurements to provide a detailed breakdown of the sector, helping us better understand the demand for each type of chef. Using this approach, we estimate that **61%** of hospitality industry chefs (**144,097**) would likely be classed as classical chefs and **39%** (**91,822**) would be production chefs.

## Industry chefs can be classed as:



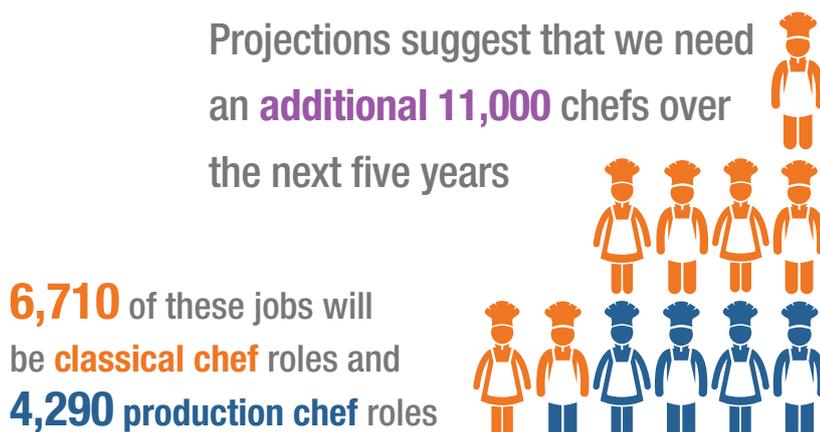
As table 2.6 shows, there is broad variation in the ratio of each chef working in each industry, with the highest percentage of classical chefs found in the hotel sector and the highest percentage of production chefs found in the pub sector. However, what is clear is that both chef occupations are critically important for each industry.

The calculations using Peter Backman’s model also suggest that the total chef numbers for pubs and bars are likely to be underestimated and may reflect the increasingly blurred line between a pub and a restaurant.

**Table 2.6: Breakdown of chefs using Peter Backman’s Market Modeller industry classification**

Hospitality industries	Classical Chefs	Production Chefs
Hotels	79%	21%
Restaurants	62%	38%
Pubs and bars	30%	70%
Food & service management businesses	65%	35%
<b>Hospitality industry total</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>39%</b>

Source: People 1st analysis using Peter Backman’s industry classifications



Projections suggest that we need an additional **11,000** chefs to meet growing demand, and replace existing chefs, over the next five years. Extrapolating the figures obtained through Peter Backman’s Market Modeller, we can estimate that **6,710** of these jobs will be classical chef roles and **4,290** production chef roles.

Why does this matter? Not only are these figures critically important to better understand the level of demand, but they also distinguish between two quite different career pathways. Too often, a distinction is not being drawn between classical and production chefs, which can exacerbate the shortage and increase labour turnover.

A classical chef requires a broad skills and knowledge base that needs to be built on. Traditionally, chefs have gained this experience on the back of a full-time college course or apprenticeship, then developed and sharpened their competence through experience and working up the brigade system.

Businesses recruiting classical chefs are looking for people who can demonstrate their competence and experience before being recruited into a chef de partie position. This pre-requisite obviously reduces the number of suitable candidates available.

In contrast, production chefs are often recruited with no or limited experience, with businesses investing in learning and development to ensure the chef has the skills to meet their business needs. They can do this because the dishes on offer are often pre-prepared, and require limited preparation and cooking skills.

Critically, production chefs don't traditionally have a body of culinary knowledge underpinning their skills although, as we will see in the **fourth section**, this is changing.

Their progression opportunities are also quite different, with many moving into unit management positions. However, a number of casual dining operators, contract food service management businesses and managed pub operators employ both types of chef, and can offer progression opportunities between the two roles.

Interviews for this report consistently highlighted the problem of people training as classical chefs, then only having opportunities to work as a production chef, which frustrates the individual and means that they won't be retained for very long.

Equally, businesses employing production chefs are often frustrated with the oversupply of classical chef students, with some criticising further education colleges for not reflecting the changing nature of industry and the types of chef required. We will pick up this debate a little later in this section, when looking at the problem associated with recruiting and retaining full-time chef students.

*“ I think there is a big distinction between becoming a chef and becoming a food assembler. There are businesses out there that are outsourcing, for example, sauces, base sauces and stocks, which are things that a chef would learn to do as part of their training.*

*“I would be very interested to know how many chefs in casual dining know how to do a roux sauce or how to make a really great gravy because, basically, it's now coming in a pouch. They have a pair of scissors and they cut it because we can't afford to have somebody come in and boil down all of the chicken carcasses at seven o'clock in the morning to make the chicken stock.*

*“I remember at [name of operator], we made everything from scratch. We managed to attract some really good chefs because we were cooking everything from scratch. If you do go to a more assembly, buying-in model, you are then entering the realms of a food producer and you won't attract a chef because a chef will go, “I'm not going to come and do that, I'm better than that.”” – Casual dining operator*



## A shrinking labour pool

### Falling unemployment

As we outlined in our recent report – *The Performance and Talent Management Revolution* – the labour market is evolving. This poses challenges for all sectors, which are competing for talent in a smaller pool, but particularly for industries like hospitality which are less competitive on factors like pay and hours.

The number of people seeking work across the UK has fallen to its lowest level in recent decades.

Unemployment currently stands at **4.3%**, although there are large regional variations, with unemployment lowest in the South East and West and highest in the North East, London and Northern Ireland.

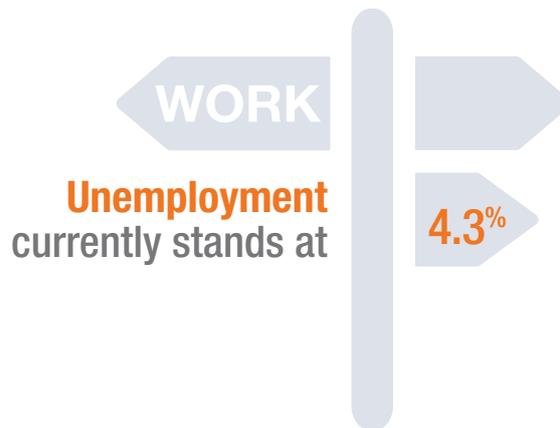


Table 2.7: Unemployment rates across the UK and English regions (March - May 2017)

	Unemployment rates	% of hospitality establishments reporting vacancies that they consider hard-to-fill
North East	5.5	43%
North West	4.3	37%
Yorkshire and The Humber	4.9	40%
East Midlands	4.0	43%
West Midlands	5.5	44%
East of England	3.6	37%
London	5.0	28%
South East	3.2	44%
South West	3.6	47%
Wales	4.1	43%
Scotland	4.0	43%
Northern Ireland	4.0	33%
UK	4.3	39%

Source: Labour Force Survey; Office for National Statistics/National Employer Skills Survey, UK Commission for Employment and Skills

## Changing demographics

Demographic changes are also affecting the way the sector recruits. Research suggests that, by 2022, there will be **700,000** fewer 16-25 year-olds and **3.7 million** more over-50s across the UK.<sup>12</sup> Given that the hospitality and tourism sector has traditionally recruited young people – a third of the workforce is under the age of 25 (two times the proportion across the economy as a whole) – this is likely to have an impact on recruitment.

The chef profession is often seen as a young person's game, given its physicality, and the figures tend to reflect this, with the number of chefs peaking at age 25-34 before falling.

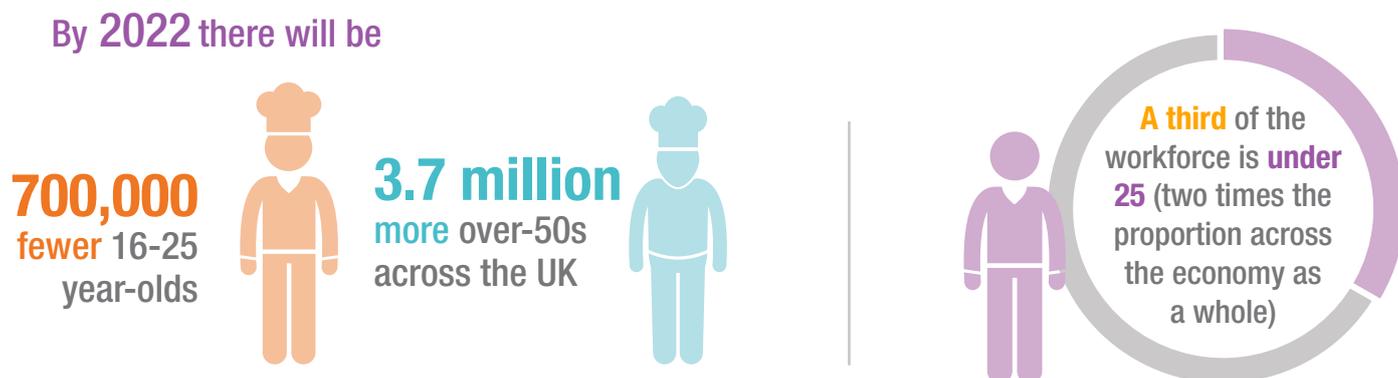
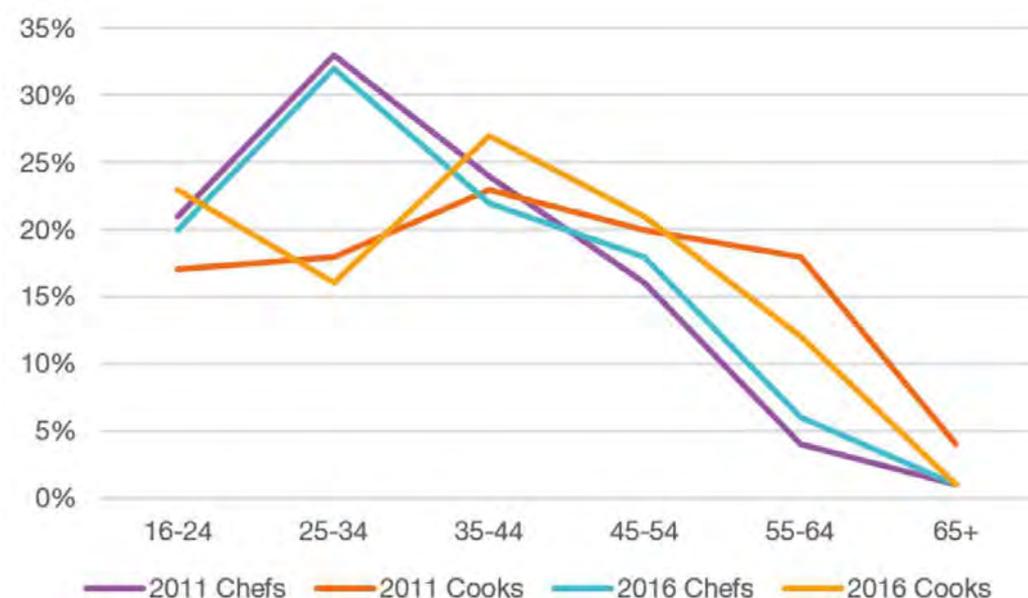


Figure 2.1 shows that this spike has not fundamentally changed between 2011 and 2016. Whilst the sector continues to lose chefs after the 25-34 age bracket, the rate of decline has plateaued slightly over the past five years, which means it's retaining more chefs for longer.

The figures for cooks, however, show considerable change since 2011. Recent figures suggest that after the ages of 35-44, the sector is losing cooks at a steep rate, which contrasts with a steady fall in 2011.

These figures provide a useful indication for labour turnover trends, but they also indicate the challenge and opportunities the sector has in terms of demographics. Currently, the sector is employing a shrinking labour pool of young people as chefs, and needs to both retain them more successfully and target and attract more older workers if it wants to keep ahead of these demographic changes.

Figure 2.1: Age of chefs and cooks (2011-2016)



<sup>12</sup> Ros Altmann (2015) A New Vision for Older Workers: Retain, Retrain, Recruit, Report to Government

## Attracting and retaining female chefs

The number of female chefs in the public eye is increasing, but there is a long way to go before we see anything like gender equality in the industry.

Whilst the number of female chefs increased between 2011 and 2016, the overall percentage of women in the chef workforce has remained the same, at **24%**.

Our interviews with head chefs suggest that many women entering the profession continue to navigate towards pastry, but that having a better balance of men and women has a positive impact on the dynamics of a kitchen. This view is reinforced in interviews with human resources professionals.

Between 2011 and 2016  
the overall percentage  
of **women** in the **chef  
workforce** has **remained  
the same**



**Table 2.8: Women employed as chefs and cooks (2011-2016)**

	2011			2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
Number of female chefs/cooks in the hospitality industry	23,813	19,102	42,915	30,148	25,977	56,125
% of total workforce in this occupation	17%	52%	24%	16%	62%	24%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics/People 1st analysis

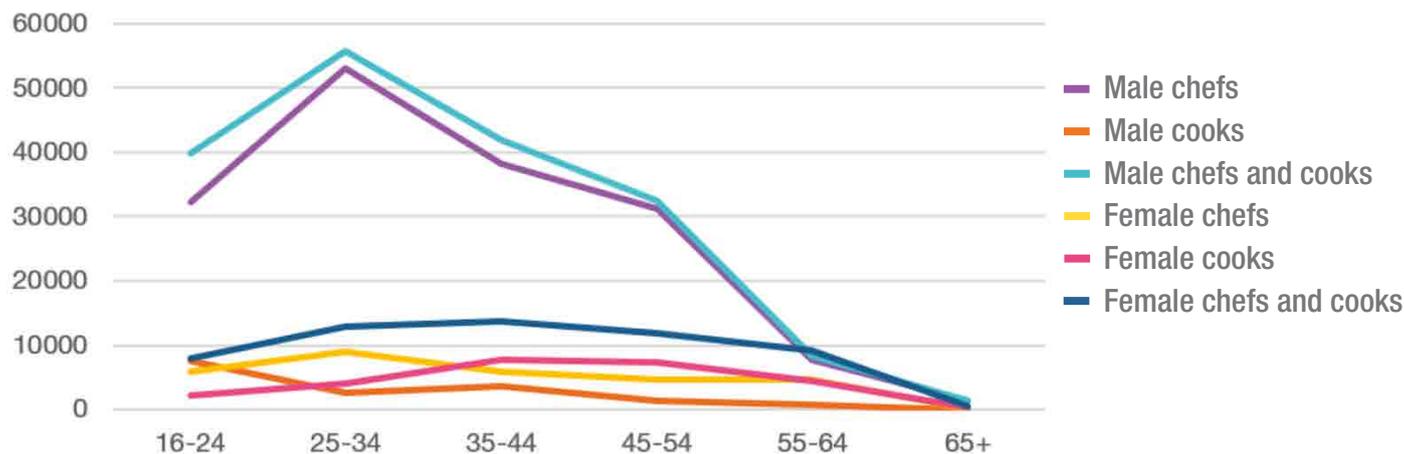
Women have traditionally filled chef and cook roles in the education and healthcare industries. These roles tend to be part-time and provide greater flexibility to balance childcare and home commitments with a job. The challenge is that these roles often have limited progression opportunities and tend to be seen separately to other chef roles, therefore reducing the opportunities to progress skilled women into the sector.

Our previous research into women working in the hospitality has shown that male and female career trajectories are very similar until around 30 years of age and that the sector fails to retain female talent following maternity leave, largely owing to a lack of flexibility.

Figure 2.2 compares the ages of male and female cooks and chefs. Firstly, the graph shows the huge disparity between the number of men and women working in these occupations. However, the figures suggest that whilst there is a spike in the number of female chefs aged 25-34, it is not as severe as men, suggesting that the few women attracted to becoming chefs are not leaving at the same rate as men and we are not seeing the drop-off of female workers that we would traditionally see across the hospitality sector who do not return after maternity leave.

It also shows that there is an increase in female cooks after 35-44, which would suggest it is an attractive option for women returning to work after childcare commitments.

Figure 2.2: Age of male and female chefs and cooks across the hospitality industry (2016)



**43%** of chef apprentices are female and, whilst there are no definitive figures for the gender breakdown of full-time chef students, our conversations with heads of college hospitality departments suggest that roughly half of chef students are female – however, many do not appear to pursue their careers.<sup>13</sup>

Focus groups with female students revealed consistent examples of intimidation which, in another work environment, would be considered to be sexual discrimination but, in a kitchen, is often dismissed as friendly banter.

Some female students saw it that way, but others admit that it has put them off working in a brigade and instead they want to establish their own coffee shops or bakeries. Clearly, this is an area that is currently under much scrutiny given the ongoing revelations in the media industry and is something that needs to be addressed as hospitality businesses are focusing so heavily on organisational values and work-based culture.

*“ I used to get picked on quite a bit because I was a girl, and I was the only girl in the kitchen. They were like, “You can’t do this or that, you can’t pick that up, because you’re a girl.” So I was just standing there saying, “Well do it yourself, if you’re going to stereotype me.” Sometimes they say it’s friendly banter, but sometimes, it’s a bit more and sort of, actually, bullying. Chefs have banter, I know they do, but sometimes it can be too much. ” – Chef student*

In 2016, the Change Group carried out a survey of **508** female chefs and found that **37%** were planning on leaving the sector or were unsure of whether to stay, although nearly three-quarters said that they would recommend the career to other women.

A quarter of chefs surveyed had children and just over half said that more flexible working hours would make it easier for women to pursue a career in the longer-term. However, whilst **32%** said being a woman had affected their career, a similar percentage thought that being female did not make any difference.<sup>14</sup>

Roughly **half** of chef students are **female** - however many **do not** appear to pursue their careers



<sup>13</sup> Apprenticeship data (October 2017), People 1st

<sup>14</sup> The Change Group, February 2016



## Too few chef apprentices in the sector

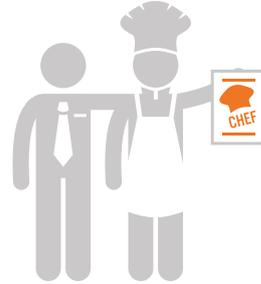
The chef profession has historically had a strong tradition of robust and quality apprenticeships, and it has been an integrated part of the brigade system.

In 2015/16 (the last year where data is currently available) **6,643** people completed a chef apprenticeship, of which half were on programmes related to classical chefs and half were on production chef-related frameworks.



# 6,643

people completed a chef apprenticeship



There will be an additional **6,400** chef apprentices completing their programmes in the next **three years**

Table 2.9: Chef-related apprenticeship frameworks in England

Pathways	2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016	
	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced
Professional cookery	1,762	385	2,459	778	2,753	812	2,463	805
Patisserie and confectionary	-	29	-	36	-	19	-	32
Food production and cookery	2,383	-	2,908	-	3,383	-	3,343	-
Catering and professional chef	4,145	414	5,367	814	6,136	831	5,806	837
<b>TOTAL</b>								

Source: Federation for Industry, Skills and Standards/People 1st analysis

These numbers are positive and are forecast to continue on the back of the apprenticeship levy and the considerable recent reform to the content, delivery and assessment of apprenticeships in England. Our projections suggest that there will be approximately **6,400** chef apprentices completing their programmes in the next three years.

Theoretically, the number of apprentices completing existing frameworks (and, soon, standards) should meet the future demand for chefs. However, it's likely that this is being undermined by higher rates of labour turnover that are being underestimated in the future projections.

The opportunities to increase the impact of apprenticeships, and the ways in which businesses are making use of them, are explored in section four.

Looking across the rest of the UK, in Scotland there have been **1,356** registrations on chef-related modern apprenticeships, with the largest uptake at level 2.

**Table 2.10: Modern apprenticeship registration Figures (1 April 2014 – 31 March 2017)**

Level	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
<b>2</b>	271	253	238	59	821
<b>3</b>	148	179	162	46	535
<b>Total</b>	419	432	400	105	1,356

Source: People 1st

In Northern Ireland, there have only been a small number of apprenticeships to match the growth in demand. Between August 2013 and April 2017, there have been **367** apprentices on catering and professional chef apprenticeships, of which **274** were at level 2, 16 were doing a combined level 2/3 programme and **77** were at level 3.<sup>15</sup>

In Wales, there have been **1,032** apprentices completing chef frameworks since 2013/14, with the vast majority of these being at level 2.

**Table 2.11: Chef-related apprenticeship certifications in Wales (2013/14 – 2016/17)**

Pathways	2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016		2016/2017		Total	
	Foundation Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship								
<b>Professional cookery</b>	85	46	189	61	116	57	40	22	430	186
<b>Patisserie and confectionary</b>	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	-	0	6
<b>Food production and cookery</b>	81	-	142	-	141	-	46	-	410	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	166	48	331	63	257	59	86	22	840	192

Source: Federation for Industry, Skills and Standards/People 1st analysis

<sup>15</sup> Statistical Bulletin, Apprenticeships NI 2013 (30 August 2017), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency



## Too few full-time chef students entering and staying in the sector

For many chefs, the 1980s and the delivery of the 706 1 and 2 Diplomas were the halcyon days of chef provision in further education colleges.

The 706 has not been delivered for over 20 years and, since then, the further education system has seemingly undergone constant change, leaving many employers confused and disengaged and lecturers dizzy and disillusioned.

Many of the head chefs we interviewed compare the ever-changing nature of the English skills system with the relative stability of chef education in mainland Europe, particularly in France and Switzerland.

One of the critical changes since the 80s is that skills has become a devolved policy area, which means that the system, and often qualifications, are different across the four UK nations.

When the 706 qualifications were scrapped in England in the early 90s, they were replaced with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), which were work-based qualifications requiring ongoing assessment.

They were designed by employers, for employers, and should never have been introduced into full-time provision. However, they were, and their very nature meant that there was little consistency in what chef students were being taught.

The assessment model also meant that employers were often frustrated that students were entering the workplace without the skills and knowledge required.

Ten years ago, NVQs were replaced with the Professional Cookery Diploma which, in many respects, provided businesses with an updated 706 Diploma, complete with a practical end test and a grading system. Most full-time chef students now take this programme.

There were **28,390**  
chef students in 2015/16.

This is nearly **three times** as  
many chef students as are  
needed to meet the current  
projections of **11,000 chefs**  
needed by 2022.



In 2015/16, there were **21,530** students completing the full-time Professional Cookery Diploma in England, of which **12,730** were at level 2 and 3. However, we estimate there were **28,390** chef students in total if we include full-time NVQ delivery. This is nearly three times as many chef students as are needed to meet the current projections of **11,000** chefs needed by 2022.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Further education and skills national achievement rates tables: June 2017, Department for Education

The fact that so many students are studying on full-time chef programmes, yet we still have such chronic chef shortages, is concerning. However, if successfully addressed, it also provides an opportunity.

We have identified four factors that are hindering the number of chef students' ability to have a significant impact on the shortage in England:

1. **Students are on the wrong course**
2. **Students see the reality of working as a chef**
3. **Students are put off entering the industry through a poor work placement and work experience**
4. **Students enter the industry, but leave within the first year**

It's impossible to calculate the extent to which each factor contributes to the shortage, but all four are felt to be important and need addressing.

### Students are on the wrong course

Both students and lecturers admit that not all students who are on a chef course actually wish to pursue a career as a chef. In some cases, this is due to poor careers information, advice and guidance. In others, it's because they joined the course because it looks fun, or appears easy.

***“ Most people give up halfway. They learn to become a chef and then give up halfway through because they've worked hard enough. I think, on our course, there's only two of us that are still in from level 1. The others dropped out. They couldn't take it and this is just the beginning.” – Chef student***

Some lecturers admit that, because they need a minimum number of students to run a course, they knowingly accept students that aren't suitable.

### Student see the reality of working as a chef

A number of students start their programme fully intending to pursue a chef career, but are put off working in the industry during their course.

Some employers have been critical about college lecturers providing a 'rose-tinted view of the industry'. However, focus groups with students seems to contradict this, with many examples of individual lecturers who have spelled out the reality of working as a chef, the impact it has on life in terms of hours, stress and pay and the commitment and drive required to pursue a career.

Lecturers highlight the importance of providing a realistic picture of working as a chef but, at the same time, acknowledge the negative impact this has on dropout rates. This was reflected in interviews with students who acknowledged the reality of being a chef.

***“ Being a chef isn't glamorous as it used to be. They used to be better-paid, more skilled, but now there's a massive divide between chefs and front-of-house and you only realise that when you work in the industry. How differently you get treated, even though your skills are completely different. But I like it, because it's my time to shine. I know I can cook, I can do pretty much everything that's required and I enjoy doing it. It's long hours and its's not always great pay, but if it's what you want to do it's what you want to do.” – Chef student***

***“ It's a job that nobody really wants to do and when people say... I remember when I was in school, and people would say, “You want to be a chef? Like, why?” People were just like, “What's wrong with you?”” – Chef student***

***“ When you describe a chef, really you describe the people who are in the kitchens, sweating their absolute bollocks off – excuse my language – but to, like, cater for other people's needs.” – Chef student***

## Students are put off entering the industry through a poor work placement and work experience

Lecturers and students both highlight the impact a positive and negative work placement can have on a student's career trajectory. There are many examples of students on placement doing menial jobs and not having an opportunity to use and develop their skills.

Most students acknowledge the need to start at the bottom and do menial tasks, but they also believe that they need to be treated better and seen as an investment for the future. A common term used throughout focus groups with the students was being treated as a 'slave'

***“ The college set the placement up, but it felt like I was missing a whole week of where I actually learn something, just to sit there and put something in the microwave. ” – Chef student***

A number of people we interviewed spoke about the importance of providing structured and enriching work placements that not only give students a realistic insight into being a chef, but also give them a wide range of opportunities to broaden their experience and understanding. This is something that not many students currently receive.

A lot of chef students also work in the sector whilst studying. Many have aspirations to work in top-end restaurants, or pubs or casual dining restaurants that use fresh ingredients and allow them to use their creativity. However, many part-time and casual jobs are in cafés, fish and chip shops and popular dining, where a lot of the food is pre-prepared. Often, this reflects the make-up of the hospitality sector in their geographic area.

As a result of this disconnect with what they are taught, and what made them want to become chef in the first place, many students become disillusioned:

***“ This college sets up a high expectation for the catering world whereas, when you get out there, it's completely different. The expectations are completely different. I can do everything by the book here, but as soon you go out to the industry everything is stopped. The managers don't really care. ” – Chef student***

***“ You are really passionate and want to express yourself, but you can't because you go to a business and they've got a set menu for six months, you know, every single day. You can't go. “Let's do a random special and just come in and throw something together.” ” – Chef student***

This reflects a real challenge for how colleges reflect the needs of the sector and, in many respects, they are in a no-win situation.

If they provide broad content, covering the essential skills and knowledge, they are open to the accusation that they are teaching outmoded skills. On the other hand, if they use more pre-prepared food, they are accused of dumbing down.

The challenge facing UK colleges is that the sector is increasingly diverse, and there are many different needs out there. This broad and varying demand isn't replicated in the rest of Europe, so looking at education provision in many other European countries isn't a fair comparison.

However, there are some excellent UK colleges delivering hospitality programmes and providing students with a broad range of experience including fine dining, casual dining, central production kitchens, coffee shops, canteens and even football catering.

The challenge for many colleges is how close they are to local employers. In a survey of hospitality departments, **38%** described their interaction with employers as 'could be better'. There is clear room for improvement and it needs businesses, as well as colleges, to change the way they interact.

A consistent theme emerging from interviews with head chefs was that it doesn't matter what qualification new chefs enter the industry with, as long as they have passion and creativity.

However, students consistently report that they are disillusioned because there are limited opportunities to express their creativity and talent. It reflects the range of opportunities available to be creative as well as what one means by being creative. One head chef said that it was 'his job to be creative in terms of menu planning and his brigade's responsibility to bring it to life consistently, plate after plate'

## The challenge for many colleges is how close they are to local employers:

In a survey  
of hospitality  
departments



described their interaction  
with employers as  
'could be better'.

## Students enter the industry, but leave within the first year

Many lecturers highlight the number of students who leave the industry in the first year of working as a chef.

For many, the long hours are the biggest challenge. However realistic the college's working environment is, new entrants are not prepared for the hours they are expected to work in the sector.

As we'll see, chefs are often working 60-70 hours a week, which can have negative impact on relationships with family and friends.

*“ You see chefs who work so many hours – like 70 hours a week – and they don't get the wage. I could work somewhere where I'd sit at a desk all day and earn like twice the wage, or more than I currently earn. It's like, what's the point in doing the hours when I could get a desk job and sit down all day, earn more and do a lot less hours? ” – Current chef*

Last year, we wrote [a blog post](#), which was originally published on the Staff Canteen website and drew attention to the number of students not staying in the sector. A number of current and former chefs responded with their own stories about why they left, or are considering leaving the sector, after completing their chef course.

All their stories mentioned hours, but they also often spoke about a 'toxic environment' of an old-fashioned climate that tolerated bullying and intimidation. This is something that we will revisit in the following section on the changing nature of chef turnover, but it seems both astonishing and depressing that thousands of passionate young people are training to become chefs each year only to see their hopes and aspirations cut short, resulting in them leaving the sector.



*“ I respect every chef who’s higher than me, because they’ve worked hard to get there, but there’s too many chefs out there that just can’t wait to target young people to scare them off. In my old job, I would turn up for work and he just got me scrubbing the pipes and stuff. I’ve lost respect for people like that. We’re here to learn, not just to be treated like idiots.” – Chef student*

*“ Employers and head chefs continue to work the youngsters coming into our industry into the ground. In 1970, when I started work in the industry, we were put on a salary and expected to work 14-16 hour days, six days a week. You have to be a very committed individual to come into our industry. Things have moved on and there are some enlightened employers out there, but there are also employers who still exploit their employees and ‘use and abuse’, because they had to do it when they trained and see it as a rite of passage.” – Current chef*

*“ As a young chef, I have wanted to leave the industry at a few stages and the main reason for that is lack of progression. I used to work in one restaurant, which was a relatively busy place with high standards so I was more than happy to be there thinking I could learn a lot from them. In reality, this was a place where I spent every day I worked there doing menial tasks because I was the new worker, And yes, young chefs will have to do the jobs no one wants to do and have to work their way up in the place, I understand that.*

*“ I spent my time filling vac-pacs. I have no problem doing the menial jobs that no one wants to do whilst I’m a new starter, because that’s what I’m expected to do. But one thing I do ask is that I’m learning something and, there, I hadn’t learnt anything, which got me frustrated. So I left, and considered leaving the industry because, if that’s how young chefs get treated everywhere they go and they get no chances to prove themselves, then it wasn’t a career I wanted.” – Current chef*

*“ It’s the restaurants that are the issue. Restaurants need to rethink and modernise their working environments or they are going to kill the chance for future generations to discover a wonderful industry. But that industry doesn’t exist yet because the people who had the responsibility to make it like that have failed. Now the world has modernised, and our generation won’t take it anymore and have more opportunities to reach greater heights in other professions.” – Current chef*

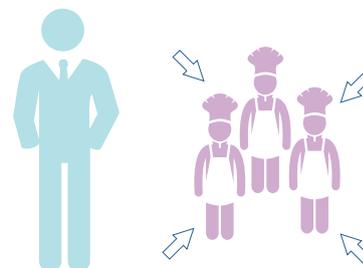
As well as these four factors, there are a number of additional pressures undermining the number of students entering the sector.

The first is falling numbers on chef programmes. In a recent survey with heads of hospitality departments in further education, **42%** of them said they had seen a decrease in numbers. The majority felt that this was a result of greater competition in sixth forms (**70%**) and fewer students interested in working in the hospitality industry (**64%**).

An additional problem is the pressure to stop delivering the Professional Cookery Diploma because of its size and cost. The demand on colleges to remove expensive areas of provision has already seen a number of them drop hospitality courses. In England, this might be addressed by the introduction of new ‘T-levels’ in the next few years, but chef students in the UK would still receive significantly fewer taught hours than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

The quality delivery of full-time further education programmes is critical to ensuring that students enter the sector with a realistic understanding and a broad skills and knowledge base. However, there are still examples of colleges that don’t fully reflect the changing needs of the sector and these organisations undermine the reputation of further education colleges in general.

**42%** of heads of hospitality departments in further education have seen a decrease in numbers of students on chef programmes.



*“ I notice that, in college, I am being taught different skills and I go into the workplace and have yet to be asked to use any of them. I also notice the difference in what I’m taught and then what I’m expected to know, or what I should know.*

*“College limits freedom to an extent, so when a place I did a shift of work in asked me to think of a special for the menu I was stumped, because I haven’t been taught what things go well with each other and what doesn’t, what flavours to use, what cooking methods, or any of that. But I’ve made a curry at least once for the last three years of college. So chefs don’t know what they should know and that’s why there are chefs in the workplace that haven’t even been to college because, to an extent, it is pointless.” – Chef student*

The situation in England doesn’t appear to entirely replicated across the other three home nations. In Scotland, completions of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) have remained relatively steady since 2013, although these figures do not distinguish between those undertaken in the workplace or as part of a Modern Apprenticeship.

The SVQ continues to be used to deliver full-time chef education, and was not replaced by the Diploma in Professional Cookery as was the case in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

**Table 2.12: Scottish Vocational Qualification completions 2013 – 2016**

2013	2014	2015	2016
2,948	2,792	2,794	2,706

Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority

In Northern Ireland, numbers on the Diploma in Professional Cookery have fallen since 2012, in contrast to the growing demand for chefs in the nation. The latest figures suggest that there were **222** students completing the programme at level 2 and 149 at level 3.

**Table 2.13: Professional Cookery Diploma completions in Northern Ireland 2012/13-2014/15**

Level	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
2	357	229	222
3	136	159	149
<b>TOTAL</b>	493	388	371

Source: Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

At a roundtable meeting held in Belfast in the autumn of 2016, head chefs and operators expressed concern about the small number of chef students entering the industry in Northern Ireland. They believed that not enough was being done to attract students, but also that opportunities in Northern Ireland were not being signposted and, as a result, chef students were undertaking placements in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

At the meeting, employers wanted to see a closer relationship between industry and colleges, but much more emphasis placed on delivering apprenticeships.

A separate roundtable of colleges in Northern Ireland supported much of what the employers had suggested and there was considerable willingness to reshape provision. Specific plans are outlined in the draft Skills Action Plan for Northern Ireland.



## The changing nature of chef turnover and chefs leaving the profession

*“The amount of headhunting and poaching in the industry now because people are so desperate for chefs, that’s something I’ve never seen before. Loyalty is just not there now.*

*“Living costs in London are so high and people have got rent to worry about. When you’ve got your landlord asking you to pay the rent and you’ve got your employer and another employer is prepared to pay you £1 an hour more, the landlord is going to win every single day of the week. I think recruiting is a huge issue, but retention is probably a bigger issue.” – Hotel operator*

*“I think hours, conditions, and money are far bigger issues now for businesses to address. There’s less need for a person to work through issues or difficulties because they know they can literally walk out and join somewhere next door, somewhere else, nearly immediately.” – Recruitment agency*

In our **recent report on the changing people and performance challenges facing the sector**, we highlighted that labour turnover was both fuelling the sector’s challenging recruitment needs and undermining productivity.<sup>17</sup>

*“Cannibalisation is quite an unpleasant word to use but, while there are people who want to move and clients who want them to join their teams, we have to get involved. We have to facilitate that and we work hard to make sure that we behave as ethically as absolutely possible. We steer clear of, you know, trying to move people quickly. We certainly don’t approach people who work with our clients” – Recruitment agency*

Traditionally, labour turnover among chefs has not only been accepted, but positively promoted, enabling chefs to broaden their experience and sharpen their skills as they move between employers and progress up the brigade hierarchy.

However, there are a number of critical changes that mean that labour turnover is fuelling the current chef shortage and undermining efforts to attract and recruit people to become chefs.

*“I think chefs are now very, very difficult to get hold of, retention is very difficult. The very nature of chefs is that they move around a lot. It used to be with chefs that you just paid them, you had to grin and bear it, you paid them more than they were worth. Now you can’t play that game anymore, because there’s always someone out there who will pay them more than you think is the maximum, especially in London. We need to think differently about how we retain and engage our chefs.” – Casual dining operator*

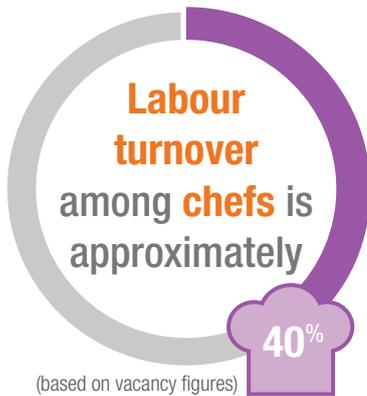
Whilst we have always had a significant rate of labour turnover among chefs, they have largely stayed within the hospitality industry. However, our interviews with chefs, HR professionals and industry commentators suggest that this is changing.

There are no specific labour turnover figures available for chefs, but we can make some broad assumptions to better understand the extent of the problem. From vacancy figures, we can estimate that labour turnover among chefs is approximately **40%**.

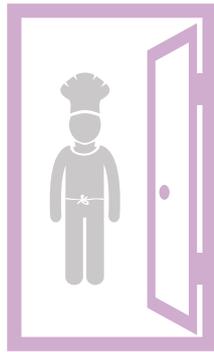
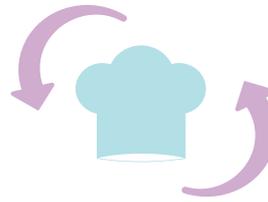
This is a conservative figure, and compares with our estimate of **75%** across the hospitality sector as a whole. However, even at **40%**, this means that nearly **94,000** chefs are changing employment each year. On the basis of the interviews for this research, we can estimate that approximately **20%** are leaving the chef profession, which means that the sector loses nearly **19,000** chefs a year and churns the remaining **75,000**.

These figures suggest that the **11,000** chefs we’re projected to need by 2022 is far lower than the true number, as it underestimates the rate of turnover in the sector.

<sup>17</sup> Performance and talent management revolution (2016), People 1st



This means that nearly **94,000** chefs are **changing employment** each year



Approximately **20%\*** of chefs are **leaving** the profession, which means that the sector loses nearly **19,000** chefs a year and churns the remaining **75,000**

(\*based on the interviews for this research)

We can also see why, with approximately **19,000** chefs leaving the industry each year, the number of chef students and apprentices entering the sector appear to be having little impact in addressing the problem.

*“We speak to a lot of chefs and, generally, they do tend to feel quite disillusioned with their lot. They have been working as a chef for a long time. It is a hard job. You’re on your feet all day. It’s antisocial hours, long hours. Not great pay, to be honest, for the kind of skilled work that they’re doing. They’re quite disillusioned. So, a lot of chefs are leaving the industry, we find.*

*“A lot of chefs are choosing to change the way that they work. So, they’re choosing to do agency work or temporary work because they can get paid by the hour, they’ve got a bit more control over their work/life balance.*

*“The general trend towards more flexible working across the whole UK, I think, is just happening in the same way in the hospitality industry. People want more flexibility. You just can’t get that as a traditional chef. It’s the complete opposite of flexible working, really. So I think that’s probably what’s affecting it more than anything.” – Recruitment agency*

**So what is driving so many people to leave the profession?**

## Hours

The fundamental, and increasing, problem is the hours that chefs are required to work. Chefs and industry observers we interviewed consistently suggested that they are working an average of 60 to 70 hours per week, with some working much longer.

*“I’ve lost chefs before because they’ve worked every single weekend, and they’ve got a home life, they’ve got a girlfriend, they might have a new baby. Say, “Look, have every fifth weekend off.” Well that’s unheard of in the chef industry. “Let your sous chef run the business that weekend, go home, relax. Spend some time with your girlfriend.” That’s what you’ve got to start thinking of now.*

*“The chef is a very, very important cog in the wheel. If you work them too hard and don’t give them the working conditions, then yes, they will go off somewhere else.” – Casual dining operator*

The chef shortage is exacerbating this further, as the remaining chefs are having to work longer hours to meet the shortfall, creating a vicious circle. Some employers are also actively recruiting more chefs to reduce the hours that their current chefs are working, which in turn is having an impact on the shortage as it increases the number of vacancies. In the final section, we will see what employers are trying to do to reduce these hours.

Whilst hours in general are a problem, the real issue for some chefs is that they are not paid for any additional hours they work outside of their contract, which causes resentment and huge frustration. Some parts of the sector, such as contract food service management, education and healthcare, benefit from this, as they often offer more sociable hours that allow chefs to have a better work-life balance.

Interviews for this research and separate figures suggest that the long hours have the biggest impact on chefs at around **35-40**, as they question their work-life balance and the fact they are missing out on their children growing up.

*“Most of our work is in schools, so it’s very appealing to people. I interviewed a couple of people yesterday for chef manager roles, who were both hotel people. What was appealing to them was the normal working hours that they would have with us. That was better from a family point of view. We have seen people who have taken a pay cut to come and work within a school environment, because they value that family time far more than perhaps they did two to three years ago.*

*“I can certainly recite a couple of instances where people have come and joined the business because they’re fed-up with working and being on-call all hours in hotels, and now feel that the working life in a school is more suited to their family life. So I think people are making a work choice, as well as a family-based choice as well. That’s helpful to us, because obviously we are a good choice for that, with schools and term-time dates, etc.”* – **Contract food management operator**

*“Well, I just think there’s a choice of jobs now. What we hear is that some of our guys leave because of pressure they’re under in shift work, and they can go and work in a factory. They can go and work driving a van. They can go and do a more 9-to-5 job now because, actually, with the national living wage, they get the same pay. The demand on them is not as great because of that so, unless they want a career in the kitchen, there’s not a need for them to stay and work hard.”*  
– **Casual dining operator**

## Quality work

Another frequent problem observed by chefs is the increasing need for businesses to offer a different and better quality job experience. This was something we addressed at length in **The Performance and Talent Management Revolution**, but also reflects the observations of Matthew Taylor in his **recent report on the changing world of work**.

In a competitive labour market, businesses need to be highly effective and flexible in how they engage and interact with their teams. Strong people management is critically important, as well as ensuring that the way the business portrays itself externally is consistent with how it treats and involves its staff.

As our recent research shows, many large hospitality businesses are making fundamental changes to achieve this and, for some, it marks a radical change from how they have operated in the past.

Kitchens are not exempt from these changes, yet HR professionals and chefs acknowledge that change here is slower. People management is seen as a particular challenge, as head chefs often adopt the techniques that they were trained under themselves.

As a result, management styles can be authoritative and ineffective at motivating and engaging a different generation of workers, who expect to interact with their place of work in ways previously unimagined.

Some head chefs have adapted to these changing expectations, but others have struggled. Often, head chefs have not received any development or support around people management and have advanced in their careers on the strength of their culinary skills alone.

**“ I think there’s a factor that if the chef can develop a following, they will have a loyalty. We’ve got some chefs who people are phenomenally loyal to, and they will move. We’ve also got some phenomenally good chefs who are terrible at managing people. The churn is constant, and in a way, it’s depressing.”** – Restaurant operator

**“ We’re looking for people who look after our chefs when they’re in a placement. When I say that, it’s things like having a proper induction when they arrive, making sure that the culture and organisation of the working environment is pretty good.**

**“I mean, we’re not expecting perfection, but we don’t want to send our chefs into absolutely chaotic, toxic environments, because they just don’t have a good experience, and it’s not very nice for them to work in that sort of environment. That’s why we’ve been working more in groups of businesses, where they’ve got a bit more of a HR policy in place.”** – Recruitment agency

**“ I can’t seem to keep chefs in their job roles anymore, purely because of the old-school management style is still there a little bit, and the bullying, and people don’t stand for that anymore. They get tired. Society has changed in its expectations, but the role has changed as well, and the industry.”** – Recruitment agency

**“ Chefs are saying, ‘We want passionate people.’ They’re blaming the young people that are coming through, saying that they’re not passionate and not enthusiastic, but what we’re not doing is evolving ourselves as the managers and mentors and leaders that we are. If we don’t evolve to adapt to the people that are coming through the industry now, then you’re never going to motivate and you’re never going to retain.**

**“So we can sit here and we can keep saying, “Oh, it’s not like it used to be in our day and people just aren’t the same.” No, they’re not the same. Society has changed, and I think that’s the problem. It’s that people are just sat there whinging about it and not thinking about solutions.**

**“Young people don’t want to work 60, 70, 80 hours a week and quite rightly so, to be fair. I mean, in this day and age, you shouldn’t have to. People’s work expectations have changed. I think it’s all very well turning around and saying, “We want passionate people. We want motivated people,” but we’re not creating those passionate and motivated people.”** – Recruitment agency

Uniquely within hospitality, being a chef is still seen as a profession and there is still a strong view that less experienced chefs need to go through what one commentator we interviewed described as a ‘rite of passage’ to prove their commitment. Many of the students we interviewed accepted the need to do this, but others don’t.

In some instances, there is a thin line between activities that would be considered as part of a ‘rite of passage’ and bullying and intimidation. For some chefs, their passion can’t overcome the daily working conditions, so they leave.

**“ When you look at the metrics of it you can see the impact of poor chef management: “This particular site, with this particular head chef, why is there so much turnover here? The stats here aren’t in line with the stats somewhere else.” Sometimes it’s about rewards and recognition, but sometimes it’s about the fact, “I can’t stand the person who is my boss.”** – Contract food management operator



## Pay and turnover

Not all chefs who leave their employer wish to leave the industry. Increasingly, they are moving not to gain experience, but instead to earn more at another establishment.

Whilst a chef may typically have stayed in post for two years previously, the consistent view expressed throughout this research is that they now tend to leave after 12 months. This reduces the return on investment for the business and means that many brigades are constantly understaffed.

*“ I don’t believe now that chefs are moving to develop their career. I think that used to be a very romantic vision, they’ll start in casual dining but then they’re wanting to work in The Wolseley and Grosvenor and develop, they’ll end up being a master chef.*

*“I think there are a few chefs who really do want to learn and they’ll go to one type of restaurant to learn one particular skill, then they’ll go to another type. Actually, they’re the ones that aren’t the problem – you will gladly take them on because you know that, wherever they’ve been before, you’re bringing in those skills.*

*“When you’re talking about casual dining specifically, those chefs, the line chefs, are moving around because they get paid more money. Or, more importantly, because they’re not getting treated very well. I just think that they have to be treated as well as the best front-of-house management. They’ve got to be treated as part of the team.” – Casual dining operator*

*“ Labour turnover is high and that also throws up a bigger challenge for us because we’re seen as a high street branded chain. So if you compare us to other high street branded chains who don’t do a lot of fresh food, the expectation from a chef from one of those brands coming to us would be, “Oh yes, it’s really similar,” but, actually, our kitchens are really difficult. Big volume, more complex dishes and lots of fresh ingredients, so that poses challenges for us.*

*“I guess because we are a high street branded chain, from the pay perspective, we aren’t paying what the Michelin star places are paying or fine dining. That’s a challenge for us.”*

*– Restaurant operator*

*“ Whereas in years past you’d be saying to the mid-level chefs: “You’ve got to go and spend a couple of years in this position,” I think that, now, if you’re talking about spending a year in that position, you might find that they are happy with that. If they spend a year in a mid-level position then the client would consider that a successful placement, whereas I think, even three years ago, you’re placing somebody and saying, “I expect them to be in that role for two years.” So, yes, it’s a huge change.” – Recruitment agency*

As we’ll see in the next section, chef pay has increased, but the challenge is that, in a competitive labour market, similar skilled occupations are earning much more. Currently, the median salary for a chef is **£22,500**, but this compares unfavourably with a median salary of **£28,969** for plumbers and **£30,122** for electricians.<sup>18</sup>

*“ I have been looking for a new permanent kitchen job for about eight months. I get about 100 vacancies a day from The Caterer. I have hardly seen any salaries above £30,000. That’s pathetic, in all honesty. Get experience in any other trade and you’re making big bucks – plumbers, electricians, joiners.*

*“The standard is minimum wage in this industry. I’ve seen countless head chef/kitchen manager jobs at minimum wage. The wages in general are sub-par and, if there was any organisation protecting kitchens, the chefs should be striking with teachers and train drivers” – Current chef*

*“ Salaried on 19k a year and doing 70-hour weeks? Been there, done that. It’s ridiculous that you’re expected to take a 9am start with a forced, unpaid three-hour break in the middle of the day and then finish about 10pm if you’re lucky, probably later.” – Current chef*

<sup>18</sup> Annual Survey of Earnings and Hours, Office for National Statistics

## The attraction of becoming a temporary agency worker

Another path for chefs who want to leave their employer is to become a temporary agency worker. For some chefs this is an attractive option, as they get paid for all the hours they work and have greater flexibility in the hours they choose.

Businesses that can't add value for their chefs in terms of wider development or working conditions are going to find it harder to persuade them why they should stay instead of becoming temporary agency workers.

Many chefs interviewed for this research were critical of recruitment agencies for fuelling the shortage, inflating wages and providing inadequately-skilled chefs.

On the other hand, agencies providing temporary workers highlighted the need for the industry to change and, whilst acknowledging that some agencies were not providing quality staff, argued that they were working closely with businesses to find temporary relief. As such, they have become a fundamental part of the current solution.

## Summary

Often, the chef shortage is seen as a binary problem of growing demand and too little supply.

However, the causes of the shortage are more complex and are a reflection of the broader changes to the workplace, such as rising costs and changing employee expectations, that we outlined in our recent report on the '**Performance and Talent Management Revolution**'.

In this section we have explored six factors:



1. **Increased demand for chefs**



2. **The changing nature of chef roles**



3. **A shrinking labour pool**



4. **Too few chef apprentices entering the sector**



5. **Too few full-time chef students entering and staying in the sector**



6. **The changing nature of chef turnover and chefs leaving the profession**

Whilst some of the problem is very much that of supply and demand, the fact that we are losing chefs from the sector also plays a critical role in driving the shortage, as does the increasingly rapid turnover of chefs moving employers.

When looking at the available supply of labour, we often don't fully recognise the positive role that apprenticeships and full-time further education play in developing new chefs. Both areas present opportunities to increase the number of chefs entering the sector.

Before we look at some of the solutions, let's first look at the impact the chef shortage is having on businesses.

# Section three: What's the impact of the shortage?

## Introduction

Now we've looked at the nature of the shortage and the drivers fuelling it, we turn to exploring the impact it's having on hospitality businesses.

We focus on seven areas:



1. Impact on business strategy



2. Re-engineering and de-skilling operations



3. Vicious circle of longer hours



4. Reliance on agency workers and the attraction of becoming a temporary agency chef



5. Chefs being over-promoted



6. Reliance on migrant workers



7. Wage inflation



## Impact on business strategy

As we highlighted in our **Performance and Talent Revolution report**, the recruitment challenge is no longer simply a HR issue, but one that is central to many business strategies.

Without the number and quality of staff, a business can't operate successfully. This is especially the case for food businesses trying to recruit chefs and, for many, it leaves them with a fundamental challenge.

*“ They feel like they're at breaking point when they ring us, and they don't know what to do. They're really, really struggling with it, and it's just a constant battle. Whenever I go and see clients and say, “What are your biggest challenges?” they always, always say recruitment. ”* – **Recruitment agency**

As we will see in the next section, businesses are increasingly focusing on how they can better retain chefs. But for those that are expanding – particularly casual dining operations – a tighter and more competitive labour market makes recruiting chefs for new openings especially challenging.

Businesses are adapting in different ways. In many kitchens with unfilled vacancies, chefs are working longer hours, whilst others are relying on agency chefs. Others are recruiting chefs without the full range of skills, or are recruiting from other European countries.

In some instances, the shortage of chefs is changing the way the business operates. The most high-profile impact of this was Sat Bains' announcement that he was moving to a four-day week. This announcement resulted in plenty of comment and highlights the severity of the problem. However, it is not an option for many businesses – particularly for kitchens in hotels – and few have followed his lead.

A number of businesses are reported to have scaled down growth plans due to the shortage. This is something that has affected the Asian and Oriental restaurant market since the points-based immigration system was introduced in 2008.

*“ What does the future look like? If you're looking at a Thai or Indian business, the good quality ones, their obstacle to growth is bringing in authentic chefs. There are huge restrictions to what they can do and it's very, very difficult. ”* – **Asian and Oriental restaurant operator**



## Re-engineering and de-skilling operations

The chef shortage has led a number of businesses to re-engineer or de-skill their operations, which means that they can rely on less staff or recruit those with fewer culinary skills and experience.

On one level, it means that businesses are simplifying their menus. In some cases, this is solely to reduce costs, but it also reduces the number or complexity of dishes on a menu. This makes it easier to recruit chefs with less expansive experience, but still produce dishes from fresh ingredients.

In other instances, more experienced chefs are preparing dishes in advance of service to allow less experienced chefs to reheat and present the final dish. This trend is also being seen in the United States.

***“ I think leaders within the kitchens are simplifying the processes in the kitchen, so that they don't necessarily need a highly-skilled chef to produce really long, complicated menus night after night. I don't necessarily think the quality of food is compromised; they're just making it easier for people to be trained on dishes. ”*** – Asian and Oriental restaurant operator

On another level, larger restaurant and contract food service management operators are expanding the use of centralised production kitchens. Not only can these help service smaller units, but they often mean that individual units can recruit less experienced chefs, as complex dishes and sauces can be prepared centrally.

As part of this trend, the growth of centralised production kitchens, which accommodate a number of brands and are operated by a third party like Deliveroo, is likely to help further alleviate the pressure for some larger branded operators.

***“ That's what food retail did 15 years ago. They took everything centrally. You would've gone into supermarkets 20 years ago and found meat prep departments where they were doing it all on-site. Now nothing's done on-site, it's all pre-prepared. Is that the right thing? I don't know, but that's what could happen going forward. There could be more – you could see a change in the way they construct many dishes. ”*** – Managed pub operator

Other businesses have looked at refreshing job roles and the number of chefs they need. We will pick this up in the next section.

Whilst a number of businesses have re-engineered their operations, others have decided to de-skill them. In some cases, this means that they have increased the amount of pre-prepared food they are purchasing, but at the other extreme some businesses are solely using sous-vide food.<sup>19</sup>

The attraction of this approach is that a business is relying on production, rather than classical, chefs which makes it relatively easier to recruit and train. On the other hand, it may compromise the brand if clients believe they are eating a dish made from fresh ingredients but, in reality, they are not. However, as a number of the chefs we interviewed highlighted, the quality of sous-vide makes it likely that clients are unaware that the food they are eating has not been prepared from fresh ingredients on the premises.

Another concern about this trend is the impact it has on retaining existing chefs, who are professionally trained and end up with less scope for creativity in their job.

<sup>19</sup> Sous-vide is method of cooking in which food is vacuum-sealed in a plastic pouch and then placed in a water bath or steam environment for longer than normal cooking times



## Vicious circle of longer hours

Whilst some businesses are re-engineering and changing their operations and, as we'll see in the next section, looking to engage and retain their staff, the vast majority of kitchens are simply continuing to advertise for chefs despite the low number of applicants.

Whilst these positions remain unfilled, existing chefs are working longer hours. This leads to higher levels of turnover which, in turn, results in the remaining chefs working even longer hours. For many businesses, the chef shortage makes it difficult to get themselves out of this vicious circle.

A number of businesses have started to pay chefs for overtime hours which removes some of the negativity around working conditions, but the need for staff to have a better work-life balance means that this is not a long-term strategy on its own.



## Reliance on agency workers and the attraction of becoming a temporary agency chef

Some businesses are choosing to back-fill vacancies with temporary agency chefs. This is a costly option, but one that provides an essential lifeline to keep those businesses operating.

*“ We don't do temporary work, like temporary chefs, but I know people who do and I know many of our clients will send us their job lists – quite lengthy job lists, particularly of mid-level staff that they need urgently – and I know that they also rely on temporary staff to keep their business going whilst they're searching. ”* – Recruitment agency

Many chefs interviewed for this research were critical of recruitment agencies for fuelling the shortage, inflating wages and providing inadequately-skilled chefs.

On the other hand, the agencies we interviewed that provide temporary chefs highlighted the stringent checks and balances they have in place to ensure those chefs are skilled and engaged. Some acknowledged that not all agencies were necessarily doing these checks, but they also suggested that the negative experience of some agency chefs reinforced why chef retention is not as good as it should be.

As we highlighted in the previous section, the attraction of temporary agency work can be compelling for some chefs, given they can earn better pay and work more balanced hours.

*“ I can think of half-a-dozen restaurants where I know that their staff are on a salary, and they're doing 60 or more hours for a set wage. Then, when they're short-staffed, they bring in an agency chef who earns probably about 25% more and is paid for every hour they do. ”*

*“This pushes people in the team to leave, to come and see somebody such as myself, and they now want an increase in salary to match what they feel they're worth and what they know the clients can pay, which puts even more pressure on the kitchen they're leaving. Yes, it's very much something that I speak to chefs about – they feel quite upset at the situation and quite undervalued. ”*

– Recruitment agency



## Chefs being over-promoted

An increasing problem, observed by both head chefs and recruitment agencies, is the number of chefs being taken on to fill vacant positions when they lack the required skills and experience.

This happens when a business is so desperate to fill the position that they feel it is better to have someone with limited experience than no one at all.

*“ They may have been a great commis, and they’ve been given a job to do something else and now they’re calling themselves a chef de partie, but they don’t have the skills to do it. Or they don’t have the classical training. I think, as much as I can say for a lot of our staff, “We can train you if you’re the right person”, if you’re recruiting in a fairly senior level in the kitchen then that’s not something we can do.” – Recruitment agency*

Many of those we interviewed understand why businesses opt to do this, but are alarmed by the impact it’s having on the sector.

In many respects, it’s creating a growing bubble of chefs advancing their careers without the required skills, knowledge and experience and, at the same time, pushing up wages. It also means that inexperienced senior chefs are developing new entrants, which creates its own vicious circle.

This bubble is likely to burst unless the number of unfilled vacancies fall, or a considerable amount of development is provided to existing chefs who lack the required skills base.



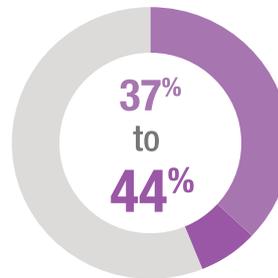
## Reliance on migrant workers

As unemployment has fallen, the number of chefs coming into work in the UK from abroad, particularly from other European Union (EU) countries, has increased.

The percentage of chefs and cooks born outside of the UK increased from **37%** to **44%** between 2011 and 2016. Looking specifically at chefs, we can see that the number of migrant workers increased **ten percent** in the same five-year period.



The percentage of chefs and cooks born **outside of the UK** increased from:



between 2011 and 2016

Table 3.1: Migrant workers in chef and cook roles (2011 - 2016)

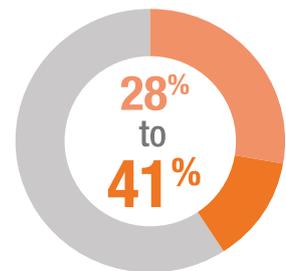
	2011			2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
Hospitality industry total	37%	39%	37%	47%	30%	44%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics/People 1st analysis

The biggest increase has come from other EU nations. Between 2011 and 2016, the percentage of migrant workers from EU nations working as chefs and cooks increased from **28%** to **41%**.



Between 2011 and 2016, the percentage of **migrant workers** from **EU nations** working as chefs and cooks **increased** from:



A similar trend can be seen in the number of chefs coming from other EU countries as a proportion of migrant workers in the sector. This has increased by **14%** between 2011 and 2015. This has clearly taken the pressure off businesses trying to recruit from a diminishing pool of UK jobseekers, but is an option that may not be as readily available after the UK leaves the EU in 2019.

Table 3.2: EU nationals in chef and cook role

	2011			2016		
	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks	Chef	Cooks	Chefs and cooks
Hospitality industry total	29%	24%	28%	43%	22%	41%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics/People 1st analysis

A particular challenge for businesses seeking to recruit chefs from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) is the current points-based system. This was introduced in 2008 to replace a complex number of visas. Its introduction has made it more challenging for businesses wishing to recruit chefs skilled in a particular Asian and Oriental cuisine into the UK, and could point to similar challenges for the wider sector after the UK leaves the European Union.

### The UK's points-based system is made up of five tiers:

- **Tier 1:** High-value (possessed of exceptional talent, highly skilled, high-net-worth investor, graduate entrepreneur)
- **Tier 2:** Skilled workers (jobs that cannot be fulfilled by a UK or EEA worker, intra-company transfers, ministers of religion or sportspersons) – capped at **20,700** a year unless the immigrant earns more than **£150,000**
- **Tier 3:** Unskilled workers (not currently in operation)
- **Tier 4:** Student (in primary, secondary, or tertiary education)
- **Tier 5:** Temporary migrants

Currently, chefs are included in the list of skilled occupations. However, given the different skill levels required of chefs that we explored in section two, the Migration Advisory Committee, which advises the government in this area, defines a 'skilled chef' as meeting the following criteria:

- Where 'the pay is at least **£29,570** per year after deductions for accommodation, meals etc; the job requires five or more years relevant experience in a role of at least equivalent status to the one they are entering;
- The job is not in either a fast food outlet, a standard fare outlet, or an establishment which provides a take-away service; and the job is in one of the following roles:
  - **Executive chef** – limited to one per establishment
  - **Head chef** – limited to one per establishment
  - **Sous chef** – limited to one for every four kitchen staff per establishment
  - **Specialist chef** – limited to one per speciality per establishment

It goes on to specify that 'a fast food outlet is one where food is prepared in bulk for speed of service, rather than to individual order. A standard fare outlet is one where the menu is designed centrally for outlets in a chain/franchise, rather than by a chef or chefs in the individual restaurant. Standard fare outlets also include those where dishes and/or cooking sauces are bought in ready-made, rather than prepared from fresh/raw ingredients.'<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, the definition excludes production chefs, but also chefs de partie, who do not have a particular specialism.

Figures are not readily available before 2011, but until April 2017, **6,930** people have come to work in the UK as chefs through the tier 2 scheme. Cost remains the biggest challenge to recruiting from outside the EEA,<sup>21</sup> as the median annual salary for a chef is **£22,500**, which makes **£29,570** out of the reach of many operators.<sup>22</sup>

Already, a few operators are reporting that Brexit and the drop in the value of Sterling following the EU referendum are making it more difficult to recruit chefs.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-k-shortage-occupation-list>

<sup>21</sup> Home Office figures for the number of certificates of sponsorship assigned between 01.4.11 to 30.06.17

<sup>22</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics

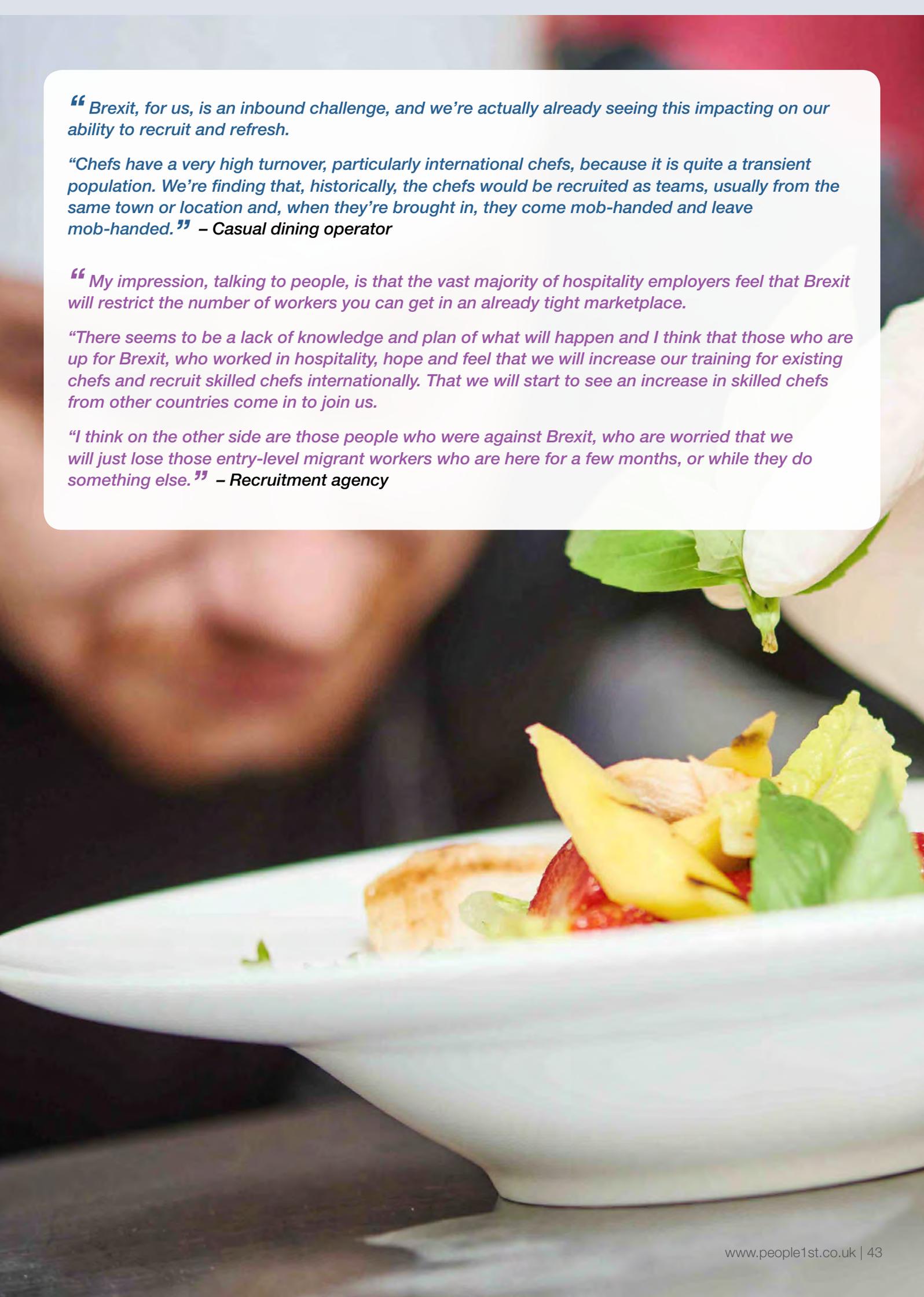
*“ Brexit, for us, is an inbound challenge, and we’re actually already seeing this impacting on our ability to recruit and refresh.*

*“Chefs have a very high turnover, particularly international chefs, because it is quite a transient population. We’re finding that, historically, the chefs would be recruited as teams, usually from the same town or location and, when they’re brought in, they come mob-handed and leave mob-handed.” – Casual dining operator*

*“ My impression, talking to people, is that the vast majority of hospitality employers feel that Brexit will restrict the number of workers you can get in an already tight marketplace.*

*“There seems to be a lack of knowledge and plan of what will happen and I think that those who are up for Brexit, who worked in hospitality, hope and feel that we will increase our training for existing chefs and recruit skilled chefs internationally. That we will start to see an increase in skilled chefs from other countries come in to join us.*

*“I think on the other side are those people who were against Brexit, who are worried that we will just lose those entry-level migrant workers who are here for a few months, or while they do something else.” – Recruitment agency*





## Wage inflation

A common theme emerging from our interviews with chefs and recruitment agencies is that the chef shortage has increased pay levels for chefs.

Between 2011 and 2015, the average median chef salary increased by **£3,000**, or **15%**, from **£19,500** to **£22,500**. This compares to an increase of **£1,370**, or **13%**, across the hospitality industry as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

There is concern that the pay increase is problematic for many businesses, particularly smaller, independent operators, as margins are tight and food costs have also risen significantly. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that salary levels need to better reflect the skill and professionalism of being a chef – if not, the sector won't be in a position to retain and recruit the talent it needs.

Figures from recruitment agency Blue Arrow show that, whilst pay across the sector has fallen by **3.1%**, salaries for chefs have increased – from an increase of **2.2%** for sous chefs to an increase of **5.6%** for commis chefs.

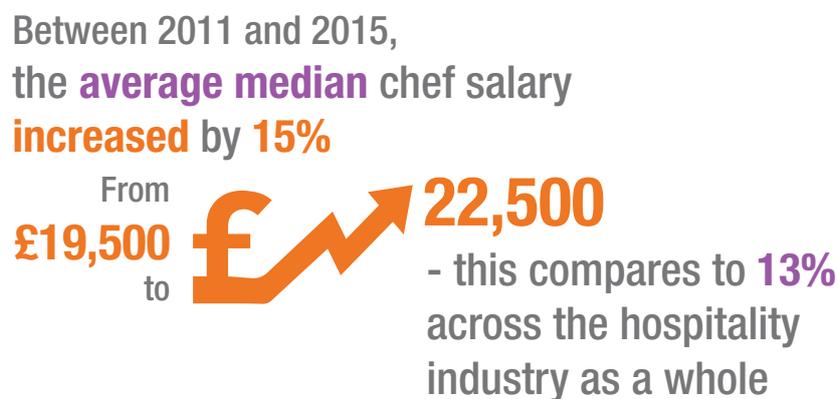


Table 2.7: Unemployment rates across the UK and English regions (March - May 2017)

	July 2016	July 2017	Annual change
Head chef	£30,509	£31,690	3.9%
Sous chef	£25,371	£25,937	2.2%
Chef de partie	£20,285	£20,900	3.0%
Commis chef	£16,862	£17,806	5.6%
<b>Industry average</b>	<b>£22,577</b>	<b>£21,789</b>	<b>-3.1%</b>

Source: Hospitality and Catering, Blue Arrow

<sup>23</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics

## Summary

The impact of the chef shortage is having a significant and negative impact on many hospitality businesses and is now a central concern for senior managers – not just chefs or those responsible for human resources.

For a lot of businesses, unfilled chef vacancies mean that existing chefs are working longer hours, which is further fuelling labour turnover. Businesses are increasingly using agency chefs, but there are insufficient numbers to meet demand. In turn, the number of chefs choosing agency work reduces the overall pool of available chefs to fill unfilled vacancies.

Given the difficulty of recruitment, businesses are also hiring chefs who lack the required skills and experience, which is creating a bubble of unskilled chefs progressing their careers.

The number of chefs from other EU countries has increased as UK unemployment has continued to fall, but Brexit could pose significant challenges to this after March 2019. The current points-based system for recruiting staff from outside the European Economic Area highlights the potential few challenges, given that so few have entered since its introduction.

A number of businesses are rethinking their operations to cope with the shortage, including reduced working hours, the increased use of production kitchens and de-skilling their operations. In the next section we look at what needs to be done to address the shortage, building on best practice.



# Section four: what needs to be done to address the chef shortage?

## Introduction

It may be challenging, but the chef shortage is neither inevitable nor unsolvable. As we have seen, the shortage is being driven by multiple factors and each will need to be addressed or overcome if the sector is to effectively tackle the problem.

It won't be easy, but it is doable. There is no simple, single remedy, nor will change come about if hospitality businesses and the sector as a whole do not alter some practices and thinking, start to build on the wealth of best practice out there and remove barriers that have, to date, prevented a joined-up approach across the sector.

In this final section, we will explore some of the activities that could be taken forward to address the shortage, building on some of the current best practice from employers and partners across the sector:



### 1. An integrated careers campaign



### 2. Early age interventions



### 3. Maximising the opportunities from colleges



### 4. Creating a quality workplace



### 5. Job and operational re-engineering



### 6. Recruiting internationally



## An integrated careers campaign

Employers and sector commentators are most often likely to suggest the need for a careers campaign and better information, advice and guidance in schools in order to tackle the chef shortage.

There is a critical need for a cross-sector careers campaign that brings together all interested organisations – all the trade associations, chef associations, learning providers, careers organisations and, importantly, employers, to drive one message that can achieve the maximum impact.

To date there have been a wide array of great initiatives taken forward, but they have failed to have a significant impact because they didn't bring together all interested parties. This has often resulted in mixed messages, a lack of longevity and cannibalisation from one part of the sector from another, rather than increasing the number of people entering the sector as a whole.

Going forward, there needs to be a radically different approach that puts competing agendas aside and unites around a central message and campaign.

**To be successful, the careers campaign needs to:**

### **Distinguish between the different career pathways of classical and production chefs**

The career pathways, skills and knowledge are radically different for classical and production chefs. The campaign needs to recognise this and demonstrate the benefits of both career trajectories.

### **Link to existing apprenticeship and full-time college programmes**

As far as possible, the campaign needs to integrate real employment and training opportunities available via the chef apprenticeship or full-time further education via the Diploma in Professional Cooking and, when it becomes available, the new T level for chefs.

Too often campaigns are abstract and don't link to real pathways. It will be important that the campaign links to employers that can offer quality opportunities, and colleges that can demonstrate that they offer quality provision need to part of the campaign.

### **Be delivered for a sustained period of time**

The campaign needs to be planned and executed over a long period to maximise its impact.

Too often previous campaigns have had a positive short-term impact, but have not been able to change the perceptions and behaviours of young people, teachers, parents and other key influencers because they have not been sustained.

### **Target all age groups and women**

The campaign should not solely target young people. If unemployment continues to fall, the competition for labour will become more intense and demographic changes mean that, by 2022, there will be **700,000** fewer 16-25-year-olds and **3.7m** more over-50s. We need to target older people who are unemployed or looking to retrain from their current experience.

In 2010, a chef conversion programme was undertaken in Northern Ireland to retrain those looking to become a chef. The programme attracted professionals from other sectors, from town planners to bakers, and combined intensive teaching in college with hands-on work experience.

On its completion, over half of students gained employment as a chef. However, the programme didn't continue beyond its initial cohort, as it couldn't be funded through mainstream routes.

In light of Brexit, there is the need for adult education funding to be made available to provide opportunities for people to retrain. This funding should be part of the government's support for occupations that rely on large numbers of EU workers and, if and when the UK leaves the EU, to support programmes like that piloted in Northern Ireland. At the same time, any such programme will need employers' support to ensure that students experience quality work experience.

As we saw in section two, women continue to be under-represented as chefs, even though numbers are slowly increasing. There needs to be more programmes to target and develop female chefs.

**One company inspiring women to consider a career in this field is Compass Group, which has an ambition that by 2020, half of its chefs will be female. Through its Women in Food campaign, it is attracting, developing and supporting women to enter the profession, reviewing workplace practices and identifying areas where shift work or flexible hours can be introduced or bolstered.**

## **Integrate with the government's existing information, advice and guidance**

This autumn, the UK Government will publish its plans for careers guidance in England, setting out how careers information and advice will be rolled out across the nation.

We understand that the plans will mandate schools to allow employers to be able to come in to talk about careers opportunities. This will be welcomed by many employers and, as a sector, we need to maximise this by giving businesses consistent promotional information that showcases the whole industry, in addition to opportunities in their own organisation. Integrating any sector campaign with the government's own support will be critical across all four nations to ensure it has maximum reach and impact, and that information being provided reflects the modern reality of becoming a chef.

## **Integrate, connect and upscale current initiatives**

There are some fabulous initiatives aimed at attracting people to become chefs and these have a critical role to play in any campaign.

However, all too often, new initiatives are launched, rather than support being increased for existing ones. This is self-defeating, as employer support becomes more diffused and both employers and the target audience end up confused.

Existing initiatives need to become more joined-up to increase their range and impact, boost their profile and reduce confusion. Organisations need to work together, rather than highlight their differences, to benefit the whole sector.

### **Just some of the amazing initiatives out there...**

- Springboard UK's FutureChef competition
- Nestlé Professional Toque d'Or competition
- Zest Quest Asia competition
- BBPA's Pub Chef of the Year
- Roux Scholarship

## Be completely employer-led

The campaign needs to be completely employer-led, demonstrating the power of combined brands and the career opportunities they offer.

Whilst employers should be in the driving seat, it would be beneficial to have one organisation managing the campaign – such as Springboard UK, which has decades of experience in this field.

However important an integrated careers campaign is to addressing the chef shortage, it will not tackle the problem on its own. We also need to maximise existing opportunities and reduce the turnover of chefs.



## Early age interventions

Evidence from this research shows that nearly all of the students on full-time chef programmes had been encouraged and inspired to cook at an early age – generally by a member of their family, or a family friend.

In some cases, children don't have the chance to cook at home and so it is important that young people have an opportunity to experience food and cooking at an early age. There are currently limited opportunities for them to do this at school, which means that sector-led initiatives to give young people an opportunity to cook are vitally important.

Two of the most important interventions already in place are the Saturday Morning Chef Academies, sponsored by the Geoffrey Harrison Foundation, and Royal Academy of Culinary Art's Adopt a School programme.

**The Saturday Morning Chef Academies** have helped over **700** 10-to-11-year-olds learn to cook. The eight-week programmes, run on Saturday mornings in partnership with the University of West London and Westminster Kingsway College, give children an opportunity to learn basic culinary techniques and presentation, learn about hygiene and nutrition and develop their teamwork and organisation skills.

The programmes also enable young people to see the opportunities available at their local colleges. A similar scheme run in Northern Ireland found that half of the students went on to enrol on chef programmes at 16.

We need more employers to support similar initiatives, and for colleges to run these programmes.

**The Adopt a School programme** teaches children about food in a holistic sense – where it comes from, how to cook it and its impact on health and the environment. Professional chefs and hospitality professionals deliver sessions in the classroom (and sometimes in restaurants or on farms) which range in content from taste and sensory sessions to advanced practical cookery and front-of-house. The programme:

- Introduces children and young people to real, fresh food through an animated approach to tasting
- Encourages children to consider food more closely and learn about food provenance
- Shows children how to grow their own food
- Teaches basic food preparation skills
- Encourages an understanding of the importance of healthy eating
- Offers an insight into the industry

Since it was launched in 1990, the Adopt a School programme has benefited more than half a million pupils and we call on more employers to help support the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts to take forward this critical initiative.

At the same time, as part of supporting occupations that would be adversely affected by any restrictions as a result of Brexit, we encourage governments across the UK to ensure there are technical education options available for those under the age of 16 to experience food and cooking.



## Maximising the opportunities from colleges

Whilst there is a need to encourage more people to consider a career as a chef, the reality is that we are failing to maximise the transfer and retention of chef students in the workplace.

Too few employers are working with their local college to ensure provision reflects industry standards yet, given the number of chef students leaving college each year, increasing their transfer and retention would have a significant impact on alleviating the chef shortage.

Colleges play a critical role, but they are often maligned. There are over **200** colleges offering hospitality provision across the UK and it's critical that this provision reflects industry standards.

In 2012, People 1st introduced an accreditation scheme, overseen by employers. The People 1st accreditation is a 'stamp of approval' that recognises college and training providers offering exceptional hospitality training. There are two levels of accreditation – gold and silver – and both employers and potential students can use the system to find the best training providers in our industry.

Colleges become accredited by undergoing a rigorous assessment process, which includes an application, evidence, verification visits and interviews and a final decision from an independent employer panel.

Over 30 colleges have successfully gone through the accreditation scheme and these can be found at [www.people1st.co.uk/find-a-provider](http://www.people1st.co.uk/find-a-provider)

In addition, an accredited college can apply to have its restaurant recognised by AA Hotel Services as part of the AA College Rosette scheme.

Many employers would be surprised how college provision has changed. In People 1st accredited colleges, students have the opportunity to study in environments that offer them a variety of different experiences from contemporary fine dining, to coffee shops, brasseries, cafeterias, central kitchens and contract catering.

The entries for the 2016 People 1st-sponsored AA College Restaurant of the Year award showcase students' own videos of their college restaurants, which capture the flavour of what colleges are offering their students.<sup>24</sup>

More employers need to establish links with their local colleges to ensure they are delivering relevant and quality hospitality provision. They can offer practical support such as:

- Sponsoring the college restaurants, brasseries and coffee shops
- Helping to deliver master classes
- Providing quality work placements

A number of larger employers have established strong links with colleges in areas where they have traditionally suffered a shortage of staff. In a number of cases, employers have sponsored college restaurants to enable them to innovate and renovate and, as a result, have regular engagement with students, helping them to recruit on completion of their courses.

<sup>24</sup> <https://vimeo.com/album/3979320>

## Student transition into the sector

One of the most important areas that needs addressing is the transition of students into the industry. One of the biggest barriers preventing students staying in the sector is their experience of the kitchen, such as their hours and the development they receive.

On the back of this research, we will be working with the chef associations, colleges and key employers to explore the introduction of a voluntary code of practice.

The code would be drawn up by employers and colleges and rolled out across the college network to provide a better transition for the students into the sector.

The code would cover some essential requirements that both employer and college would commit themselves to. This could include areas such as:

- Hours and rotas
- The types of development on offer
- Hygiene factors, such as uniform

This will ensure that more chef students enter and remain in the sector and find employment with employers that will invest in their development.

Whilst many of these changes are in the gift of employers, we also need the government to ensure that the transition to the new T levels is smooth, is available for chefs and that the content reflects the new apprenticeship standards, which have been developed by sector employers, as much as possible

We also need the government to address the current incentive for schools to encourage students to continue into sixth forms, despite their career aspirations.



## Creating a quality workplace

All too often, the chef shortage is seen as an isolated issue facing hospitality businesses. However, as we have highlighted throughout this report, it is in fact the consequence of the many HR-related issues that hospitality businesses are currently grappling with.

We explored these issues in our recent report – **The Performance and Talent Management Revolution**. In the report, we highlight how many large businesses are rethinking their HR strategies as a result of three key drivers:

- Rising costs
- Recruitment difficulties
- Changing employee attitudes

We have seen in **section two** that all three factors are having an impact on the chef shortage, and, like the operators we spoke to for our performance and talent management report, we've found that businesses are also rethinking the way they recruit, retain and develop chefs.

In larger companies, this is often part of a wider approach to address critical HR-related issues. In other cases, it is being taken forward specifically to address the chef shortage. It often requires the support of dedicated HR teams or senior managers, as one critical barrier is that chefs are often caught in a catch-22 situation where they can't implement change because staff shortages mean they don't have enough time.

The real dilemma for many businesses is that they are operating on wafer-thin margins, with rising food and staff costs and a highly competitive market where they don't feel that they can pass additional costs to the customer.

To increase staff retention, many businesses need to increase wages and recruit additional chefs. Many don't have the capital to do this and others aren't prepared to reduce profitability by increasing their operating costs.

There is a case to be made that reducing staff turnover will lower ongoing recruitment costs and, through better retention and development, increase productivity. This is the approach that more businesses are adopting and breaks with traditional thinking.

There is also an alternative way of thinking, which believes that the fact that wages are increasing in order for businesses to recruit chefs and that increasing numbers of chefs are gaining positions without the relevant skills undermines both the retention and productivity argument. So what is the answer?

The answer must lie in offering a holistic package of a competitive salary, realistic hours, tangible development and a good working environment, and this is what more businesses are beginning to move towards. This is also likely to address the unhealthy bubble of chefs gaining positions and increased pay despite not having the relevant skills or experience.

The **Performance and Talent Management Revolution** report highlighted some practical steps that hospitality businesses are taking to improve retention, engagement and productivity. However, businesses are also undertaking specific activities to address the chef shortage.

## Recruitment

*“ We don't look any further than our front doors. So we're not actually looking at how to develop the industry as a whole and work together. Okay, it's the same with recruitment. Recruitment is getting more and more desperate. So instead of thinking about the processes that we could put in place to actually start retaining our teams and actually start building relationships with them, there's such a desperation out there to hit your KPIs, to get your money so you can retain your job.*

*“People are forgetting that they're working with people's careers and, you know, it's somebody else's life that they're working with, and I think the level of communication is terrible.” – Recruitment agency*

*“ Businesses have got to start thinking differently. It has changed our focus on recruitment. We just have to make sure that our GMs and our head chefs can see that the world isn't like it was when they joined. Things have changed.” – Contract food service operator*

HR professionals and recruitment agencies consistently believe that the recruitment of chefs needs to change by moving away from short-term firefighting to building a longer-term, sustainable approach. This means getting away from the vicious circle that many businesses find themselves in and looking at recruitment as part of wider approach that includes staff engagement, retention and development.

Recruiting full-time chef students when they have completed their course and offering chef apprenticeships are two practical steps that employers can take as part of this approach. The opportunities to work with colleges are **outlined earlier in this section** and a map of where to find a People 1st accredited college can be found at [www.people1st.co.uk/find-a-provider](http://www.people1st.co.uk/find-a-provider)

*“ We've done some work branding their college restaurant. We have students come into the business for chunks of time, maybe a couple of weeks at a time, and get experience across all areas of the business. Our chefs are going into the college and working in the restaurant with their teams, at different times throughout the year. I think things like that are finally starting to pay dividends.” – Hotel operator*

## Maximising apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have always been an important part of many kitchen brigades, but they are growing in importance and how they are being used is changing.

A lot of businesses are taking advantage of the changes to the apprenticeship system in England, which has meant that employers have much greater flexibility in how they develop the skills and knowledge of any apprentice chef, as long as they can demonstrate that they have the breadth of competence required to meet new apprenticeship standards at the end of their programme.

These apprenticeship standards have been written by employers and are already available for classical chefs, with a standard for production chefs currently in development.

**For more information on the apprenticeship reforms and the levy and to view the chef standards go to [www.people1st.co.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.people1st.co.uk/apprenticeships)**

For larger businesses, the apprenticeship levy, which was introduced this April, has meant many employers are rethinking how they can get the best return from their apprenticeship investment. As a result, apprenticeships are becoming a much more integrated solution, rather than something that sits alongside existing learning and development.

Businesses are now looking at cohorts of apprentice chefs being offered periodically, rather than recruiting just one or two individuals each year. Some businesses have created chef academies or schools to help market their apprenticeship opportunities and build a structured development programme that meets their needs.

*“ We have developed a chef academy in conjunction with local colleges, which is quite an interesting programme, I’m quite proud of it. It’s taken me forever to get it off the ground, a bit like pushing water uphill. But I’m getting there with it. So that’s based around apprenticeships for chefs.” – Casual dining operator*

*“ We started our chef school last year. Basically, apprentices do a monthly development session that could be on very specific topics – they’ve done a trip to some of the markets, they’ve been to producers, those sorts of things. Then the last session they did was on finance and GPs and all of those things. So we bring them together as a group.” – Contract food service management operator*

It takes time and a knowledge of the apprenticeship system to set up these academies, so many work in conjunction with a commercial learning provider or college which has specific apprenticeship expertise. There are many providers registered by government to deliver apprenticeships, but employers often ask us “how can I tell if an apprenticeship provider is good?”

To answer that question, we introduced the People 1st gold standard apprenticeship provider recognition. Every single one of our gold standard providers is rigorously assessed, and regularly reviewed, on their ability to deliver an outstanding service to employers.

**To find a gold standard recognised provider go to [www.people1st.co.uk/gold-standard-providers](http://www.people1st.co.uk/gold-standard-providers)**

**People 1st can also provide impartial guidance and support to help businesses establish an academy and find an appropriate provider to meet their needs.**

**For further information go to [www.people1st.co.uk/apprenticeship-strategy](http://www.people1st.co.uk/apprenticeship-strategy)**

The reforms in England have meant that there are very different apprenticeship systems in each of the four nations.

In Northern Ireland, there is an ongoing review of the apprenticeship and research for the draft skills action plan positions it as a critical tool to help address the chef shortage.

There are currently no plans to change the apprenticeships in Scotland and Wales and both nations have well-established chef apprenticeships.

## Rethinking recruitment approaches

An increasing number of businesses are reviewing the way they approach recruitment.

On one level, they are reviewing their methods to ensure that they are as effective as possible. More businesses are evaluating the success and value for money of their current approaches and, in some cases, are changing the way they recruit.

For some larger businesses this means centralising recruitment, and in businesses of all sizes it is resulting in a more targeted approach, such as establishing links with colleges, creating chef apprenticeship opportunities, using social media and targeting chef sites.

As a result, some are moving away from online job boards, which have become so important to businesses' recruitment over the past ten years. In other cases, they are taking a more proactive strategy, combining the use of job boards with social and online marketing to try and stand out from the crowd.

On another level, businesses are increasingly professionalising the process through more effective promotion of the benefits of working for a particular company, such as the learning and development opportunities on offer, career opportunities and other financial and non-financial benefits.

In businesses of all sizes there is evidence that head chefs, who may have previously been solely tasked with recruiting to their brigade, are getting more support from the rest of their business, often from their HR team.

Given this fresh thinking, the selection process is one of the areas that is being challenged.

Traditionally, chefs may have been asked to come for an interview and then demonstrate their skills by working a shift or doing a practical task. In many businesses, this process is taking too long and, given the demand for chefs, means losing valuable talent.

Many of the HR professionals and recruitment agencies interviewed for this research believe that chefs should be recruited based on an interview and then given a probation period, as would be the case in other roles. This may mean, in some cases, that head chefs need to be supported to develop better interview techniques.

This is an area that is hotly contested, as it would be a break from long-established processes. Two key barriers for head chefs are a lack of time and trust in the skills in the applications, which is why the additional support from others, where available, in the company is so critical.

***“ It is very much down to the leadership within that particular business as to whether they are working at speed or not, to recruit, and their openness to innovation. ” – Recruitment agency***

***“ I spent a year working with chefs in Dubai. Whilst certainly not perfect I see less pressure on some of those businesses because they have a visa system that, if you need a skilled member of staff, you can bring that person in. I see businesses that are open to recruiting somebody and flying them in, without a trial, and paying for that flight, to come in and join the team immediately. ” – Recruitment agency***

***“ So we have a candidate who's been offered a job. He's waiting for a start date. He's basically living hand-to-mouth and scratching around for agency work because he can't commit to anything else whilst he's waiting for a start date to come through, and three weeks later we hear from the client. So people just do not know how to pick up the phone. Everything's done by the touch of a button, and all these guys that are growing up in that kind of environment and that kind of society, it's like they don't know how to actually communicate with people anymore. ” – Recruitment agency***

## Retention and engagement

Retaining chefs needs to be a critical part of addressing the chef shortage, yet it rarely gets a mention. This reflects the broader view that labour turnover is inevitable in hospitality, as well as the reality that is a multi-faceted problem to crack (particularly in relation to chefs).

However, given the cost and the negative impact on productivity this is beginning to change in some larger businesses.

*“ I think hours, conditions, and money are far bigger now. There’s less need for a person to work through some issues or some difficulties because they know they can literally walk out and join somewhere next door, nearly immediately.” – Recruitment agency*

*“ I think chefs want to be paid for the hours they do. I think that they want more flexibility in working hours and I believe they would want more training or ability to improve themselves, within the restaurant. I think the industry needs to accept, if it’s to keep itself afloat, it needs to look at using skilled staff that it perhaps doesn’t utilise at the moment.” – Recruitment agency*

*“ They’re moving because, yes, they can earn more money. It’s more flexible hours, okay, but if you’ve got somebody in a permanent position, all people need to know is that they’re valued, they’re achieving and they’re loved to a certain degree. That they’re actually getting a two-way street in employment. That’s what everybody needs.*

*“It’s just human nature as human beings. We want to feel like we’re achieving. If we can create those environments permanently then they’re not going to go to temporary, because we didn’t back in the day. Temporary was, like, what you did if you didn’t have a permanent job or if you were between jobs and you just needed something to scrape around for, and now it’s becoming a career path because they feel that they’re getting more experience and learning more by moving around different kitchens. It’s completely the opposite.*

*“I mean, at the end of the day, yes, society and the people have changed, or their expectations, but human nature hasn’t.” – Recruitment agency*

*“ The excuse I always get is the money, but I do think that it’s possibly a lack of innovation. I think there’s definitely a culture of, “We’ve always done it this way,” especially with the old-school chefs who maybe have been in the industry a very long time. They put in the 100 hour weeks when they were training, and they feel like that’s a, kind of, rite of passage, and everyone should have to do that.*

*“You know, that’s fine, but the world has changed, and people don’t want that from work anymore, and businesses need to respond to what people want. If you don’t, they’ll lose them, and that’s what’s happening with the chef shortage, I think.*

*“When the chefs work out their hourly rates, they’re earning less than minimum wage a lot of the time, so they might as well just go and work in an easier job, earn minimum wage, and have better hours and spend time with their family. What’s the point in working your arse off?” – Recruitment agency*

Chef retention is challenging; not only is it something that has traditionally been encouraged to broaden individuals’ skills and experience, but the current reasons as to why chef turnover is high are varied. However, there are a number of practical steps that can be taken to address it.

## Culture and management

A critical area for attention is the culture of the kitchens and the management skills of senior chefs.

It has long been the case that the kitchen has had its own culture, separate from the rest of the business. This is traditional – it often reflects the pressure of the environment and the fact that it has often been a heavily-male bastion.

The kitchen cannot be exempt from the increasing emphasis on mental health in the workplace and sexual intimidation. It's time to change. Not only is it not socially acceptable, but it's also getting in the way of creating a positive working environment to attract and retain the best talent. With more chefs considering temporary agency opportunities, it is a key differential to make them want to stay with a business.

***“ We’ve got a great opportunity in terms of hours, because I think we’ve got more chance of being flexible than some of the restaurant high-street chains, so we need to talk about that more. It needs to become more in our culture to do that. But the real thing we wanted to crack was the atmosphere and banter in kitchens, because, if you look at the percentage of women that go to catering college, that’s more than the percentage of chefs that we’ve got. Women are falling out of the profession at a disproportionate rate to men.” – Casual dining operator***

Much has been written about millennials and their need to work for a business that has strong values that resonate with their own, and an organisation that they can actively engage with. Arguably, these needs are not confined to millennials and, in a more competitive labour market, are factors that all job seekers are looking for.

This means a supportive working environment and many kitchens provide this. However, there are still many that do not. What marks them out is often the management approach of their senior chefs.

Given chefs have traditionally been promoted because of their culinary skills, many haven't received the management and leadership development that would have been available to other roles in the industry.

As we will see in our forthcoming report on changing managers in the visitor economy, the need for managers to possess strong technical skills, along with an increasing breadth of softer skills to communicate, engage, support, develop and motivate their teams, is critically important.<sup>25</sup>

***“ Basically, I think this industry has always been quite guilty of, “Oh, you can cook and you can do this and you can do that and you can run a section, therefore we’re going to naturally promote you to the next level.” What they’re not doing is they’re not teaching any management skills. I think every junior sous-chef should go onto an apprenticeship, because it will teach them to actually manage and know what’s acceptable behaviour and what motivates people.” – Recruitment agency***

A number of larger businesses taking part in this research are beginning to develop these skills through an apprenticeship or shorter, targeted courses.

One critical tool that managers can use is a performance review, and this is becoming more important for businesses to engage and support staff. There is a clear move away from annual performance reviews to regularly informal catch-ups to 'take the temperature' of an individual which allows the business to address any issues before someone leaves.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.people1st.co.uk/insight-opinion/upcoming-research/what-do-our-future-managers-look-like>

<sup>26</sup> Performance and Talent Management Revolution (2017), People 1st

***“ They will have appraisals every six months, or some chefs might even do it every four months seasonally, where they will sit down and talk to the individuals about where they want to be, what they want to learn, if they want to develop or are they just happy coming in and doing their job, if it’s just the salary, or if it is a career they are looking at. So things like that to sort of progress the people forward and move them on – if people are interested in competitions, if they want to join the Craft Guild membership.” – Contract food service management operator***

Linked to this are regular engagement surveys. These can be anonymous engagement surveys taken across the company or, increasingly, a conversation with staff to better understand what makes them stay. Understanding what motivates an individual to stay helps the business reinforce those areas and helps promote them in their recruitment process.

***“ We speak to people about what makes them stay. So if we can understand what it is that makes the chefs we have stay, then we can do more on that, or make sure we don’t change it, or that managers understand that, the chefs really value this, so for goodness sake don’t change it. They like it, they want it, let’s keep it there.” – Contract food service management operator***

As part of creating the right culture in the kitchen, some organisations have introduced a code of conduct to spell out what is acceptable. However, whilst this is important, its effectiveness will largely rest on how it is introduced.

It is more likely to create real behavioural change if chefs and those who interact with the kitchen are involved in drawing up the code. This has the advantage of making them reflect on those behaviours and comparing them with other workplace settings as well as ensuring they feel ownership over its content.

***“ Like everywhere, we’re still working to change the way our kitchens work and manage. We brought in something last year; we called it, ‘Kitchen Charter’. It’s a ‘mind your Ps and Qs’ type charter that was about trying to re-educate some of these guys about what is appropriate banter. If you wouldn’t say it to your mum or sister, don’t say it in the kitchen.***

***“Importantly, we put lots of focus on the kitchens for them to change their behaviour. We’re really trying to do a whole education piece, both front-of-house and back-of-house, with what is appropriate banter and where there’s professionalism, but fun. We didn’t send it out as a, “Sign your name here in blood to say you’ll never do this.” It was about trying to coach some of these guys about a different approach and a different way of doing things.” – Hotel operator***

Businesses are also looking at improving the physical environment to make the workplace more pleasant and differentiate themselves from competitors. Examples including investing in better and brighter lighting, repairing floors, investing in uniforms, shoes and clogs, and renovating staff changing rooms and eating areas to make them more attractive, secure and hygienic.

## **Hours and shift patterns**

The excessive hours chefs are working are a critical factor driving labour turnover, yet probably one of the most challenging areas to address. As we saw in the last section, the shortage of chefs increases the number of hours remaining chefs have to work, which then fuels labour turnover, which in turn drives the shortage. Breaking this vicious circle is crucial.

Businesses need to step back and think about how their brigades can be organised to reduce the number of hours – how many chefs are needed for which shifts, whether preparation be done by other teams working different shifts and what skill-level of chef is required to undertake certain tasks at certain points of the day.

The answers to these questions will uniquely depend on each business and its operation. However, it's vital to take a step back and think differently. It often helps for a senior chef to get support from others in the business or external partners to ask key questions and challenge existing thinking.

***“ I think there's certainly the desire for us to innovate whilst there are big gaps in kitchens and in our ability to recruit. It makes it so challenging to be able to change some of these working practices, because you almost need a full brigade before you can change how they're working. But we've done a mix of different things. We've looked at shift rotation. We've been looking at three days off, rather than two days off at a time. Looking at bringing in more people for daytime shifts to reduce some of the volume and the late working. ” – Hotel operator***

Some businesses that have done this have changed shift patterns so that less experienced chefs, working under a senior chef, prepare for service during the day, allowing more experienced chefs to come in later. This also means that less experienced chefs aren't working excessive hours, but are still gaining experience and developing.

Other businesses have looked at whether they need specific skills for only a few hours a week, therefore understanding the hours that chefs wish to work and seeking chefs who are looking for greater flexibility in hours, such as women with childcare responsibilities.

***“ Bringing in chefs for our hotels, it was a different approach, and we struggled to get some of them on board. You know, it didn't need to be a culinary genius to come in and support with breakfast, to do some conference lunch, buffet lunch and help with some preparation for evening food. Some of our head chefs get very caught up with culinary experience and skill, and actually sometimes you just need a really good person.***

***“Realistically, we could offer that as a Monday-to-Friday, 9am-to-5pm role, so we've done that. Trying to bring some more women into the kitchen is key. That [Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm role] gives us the ability to do that more, if we can be more competitive with the hours. ” – Hotel and restaurant operator***

Over the next five to ten years there will be significant change in the way that hospitality businesses offer their staff greater flexibility, both in terms of packages and hours. Kitchens will not be exempt from these changes. It will require a greater emphasis on good management skills to deal with this new way of working, but also the right systems and processes to manage this flexibility, in which technology plays a critical role.



## Pay and incentives

Hours and pay go hand-in-hand, for, as we have seen, a lot of chefs are not being paid for the additional hours they work. This is beginning to change, and is a factor in why businesses are looking afresh at their shift patterns to create a system that is more sustainable and cost-effective.

Does chefs' pay reflect their skills? Most chefs, HR professionals, recruitment agencies and others taking part in the research do not believe so, but they also highlight the tight margins that operators are working to.

In October 2017, accountancy firm Moore Stephens highlighted Insolvency Service data which showed that the number of restaurants entering insolvency has increased by **13%** in 2016/17 to **1,544**, from **1,363** in 2015/16. The fall in Sterling, interest rate rises and the uncertainty over Brexit has resulted in a volatile market, which, in part, continues to discount to maintain footfall.

### So what are the options?

One option is that businesses do not increase pay, but that comes with its own financial cost. As we have seen, improved pay is an increasing factor in chefs moving employer. If a business can't or won't replace that chef, the remaining chefs will work more hours to compensate which may lead to them leaving too. Alternatively, the business could bring in temporary agency chefs, who can be more expensive than their permanent counterparts. So, in essence, costs may rise regardless, and the business will have little control of them.

The alternative is to review pay in line with comparable rates locally, which may mean some increase in salary. Some businesses are taking this approach and are linking pay levels with ongoing development (see below). Whilst this approach obviously increases costs, it does mean that the business is more in control of how they are rising and can position pay as part of a wider package of benefits which can encompass development and a positive working culture.

Increasing costs will naturally eat into tight margins, so businesses are also looking at productivity gains to reduce other costs and increase outputs. This is discussed below.

One of the drivers of increased pay has been temporary agency chefs. Some would argue that the going rate of agency chefs reflects their skill levels and the real market rate, which highlights that chefs are not being paid adequately for their skill level. Others argue that pay for temporary chefs is skewing pay overall and, as a result, businesses are reducing investment in other areas.

***“ If you're in a nursing profession at an agency, there is a cap on how much you can charge per nurse and how much you can pay them. Basically, that's to stop driving nurses to temporary work. Temporary agencies are the only ones who are making any money in this industry at the moment and they're charging up to £22 an hour for a chef de partie who, generally speaking, doesn't have the skills. They don't really give a monkey's because they're paid by the hour and then somebody accepts them and they're going to get money.” – Recruitment agency***

There is a clear need for a sensible debate on pay for chefs within the sector and the pay rate for agency chefs needs to be included within that.

We suggest that the chef associations, together with the relevant trade association, examine this, particularly in light of Brexit. There is currently a disparity between the current tier 2 salary for chefs of **£29,570** and the median rate of **£22,500**.

An increasingly competitive recruitment market will also mean that the sector is going to struggle to attract talent when, as we saw in the previous section, comparatively-skilled roles are earning significantly more.

## Learning and development

Any increased costs need to reflect the skill of the chef and, clearly, there are concerns that a number of chefs are in positions they do not possess the required skills for.

There needs to be a renewed emphasis on learning and development in order to develop the culinary skills and knowledge of existing chefs, as well as softer skills and management skills, and to aid retention.

There is a strong tradition of learning and development in UK kitchens and this accounts for the reputation of UK cuisine. Traditionally, this has largely been informal learning under the tutelage of experienced and highly skilled chefs. This continues for some, but the day-to-day pressures of the chef shortage and more inexperienced chefs in higher positions means that this development is being undermined.

Many businesses are looking again at how learning and development is packaged. We are seeing it becoming more structured and linked to externally recognised programmes, such as the apprenticeship. This makes the development more transparent, which helps to market it for recruitment and retention, but it can also mean businesses can more easily link pay to the successful completion of specific learning and development.

This development also includes opportunities for learning enrichment through visits to other countries, markets and suppliers which expands the chefs' knowledge and experience.

The case against offering more structured learning and development is that staff will leave before, or shortly after, completing it. Businesses are therefore tying investment to external training, such as apprenticeships, to retention packages, which allows them to retain chefs for longer.

*“ I think the majority of kitchens are trying to offer training in-house. I think very few employers are paying for external training, because they feel, “Why pay when this person potentially might not be here, even by the end of the training?” There are some that obviously do pay for the training and do see more, but I think many kitchens are happy to try and train in-house, and obviously themselves, if the chef wants to learn.” – Recruitment agency*

*“ There are structured programmes where we take chefs from a certain level – you know, chef de partie, for example – and you take them to a certain level. You would mentor them, you would do certain things with them in order to get them ready to take the next role as a sous chef.” – Hotel operator*



## Job and operational re-engineering

In **section two**, we saw how some businesses are re-engineering how their chefs work in order to increase productivity, reduce costs or achieve both.

There is much debate about the long-term impact of some of these trends, but few would argue that, in the short-term, they will help alleviate the chef shortage:

### De-skilling

A number of businesses have de-skilled their operations by adopting techniques such as sous-vide. This reduces the need to recruit and retain classical chefs and means businesses can employ production chefs instead.

Many taking part in this research think it is an extreme response that will undermine quality and the reputation of a business.

***“ I think de-skilling is a short-term fix for businesses. De-skilling the kitchen team moves it away from professional chefs. Very rarely do I meet a chef looking for a new job because they feel they’re being pressured to do too complex a task.***

***“The classic answer to an interview question is, “I’m looking to move because I want a new challenge. I want to learn more. I want to improve myself.” By de-skilling, what the business is doing is making short-term recruitment easier, because they can pay less and recruit a wider group of people, but they’re not helping the industry in the long term.”*** – Recruitment agency

Some businesses have de-skilled more subtly by buying-in more prepared items. This can be costly, but it largely depends on the level of the shortage and the cost assessment for the business

### Expansion of production or dark kitchens

Multi-site businesses can also benefit from production kitchens, and projections are that these will grow over the next five to ten years, particularly as a result of the growth of home and office deliveries.

Some of these will be operated by specific restaurant and food service management operators and others will be run by delivery organisations, such as Deliveroo.

One experienced market commentator estimates that half of the growth of production kitchens will be accounted for new markets, stimulated by home delivery, and the other half will cannibalise the existing market.

Their growth means that businesses rely on a smaller cohort of experienced classical chefs in the production kitchen and less experienced or culinary skilled chefs in individual restaurants or units.

### Other innovations

Businesses have also looked at other innovations to increase productivity and reduce costs, including simplifying the menu. Some believe that this has helped to develop less experienced chefs, but there are mixed views as to whether it has a significant impact on reducing food costs.

Other examples include using technology to improve the communication between the kitchen and restaurant and the use of temperature controls, automated ordering and costings, all of which can help free up valuable time.

***“ I think it’s really obvious that menus are being simplified, shortened, and you can tell that the reason they’re doing that is because they need to simplify the process in the kitchen, so that they don’t necessarily need a highly-skilled chef to produce really long, complicated menus night after night. So I think leaders within the kitchens are simplifying the processes in the kitchen. I don’t necessarily think the quality of food is compromised.”*** – Recruitment agency



## Recruiting internationally

The fall in unemployment has seen an increase in the number of chefs recruited from other EU countries. It is not yet clear what restrictions may be imposed on EU workers coming into the UK if the UK were indeed to leave the EU as a result of the 2016 referendum vote.

Anecdotally, some operators report that some existing staff from other EU countries are returning home, largely due to the fall in Sterling and the recovering of the Eurozone economy.

If restrictions were to be imposed, and it would be likely that some would be introduced, then this would have a negative impact on the chef shortage, certainly in the short-to-medium-term. It would effectively reduce the pipeline of skilled chefs coming into the sector.

As we have seen elsewhere in the section, there are key interventions that hospitality businesses can adopt to help address this problem, but some of this will take time and will never completely eradicate the need to bring in staff from outside the UK, not only to address a shortage, but also to bring new innovation and speciality skills.

The only clue we have available as to what any future restrictions may look like is the tier two criteria we saw in the **previous section**, which is in place for those coming in from outside of the EEA. As we have discussed it is highly restrictive and, as a result, a limited number of businesses have used it.

We recommended above that the pay rate for chefs needed to be debated within the sector, but the sector also needs to work constructively with government to ensure that any restrictions are realistic and reflect its labour and skill needs.

Other countries, such as United States, Australia, New Zealand and The Netherlands are using immigration in an attempt to address their chef shortage and their criteria are less prohibitive.

## Summary

In this section we have suggested a number of key actions to help address the chef shortage. It can be addressed, but it needs a fresh approach.

The old ways of thinking will not successfully tackle the multifaceted issues driving the shortage. It requires action at a business level, across the sector as a whole and by government. It also needs a holistic approach that doesn't just focus on careers, but also on why we continue to lose talented chefs.

Can it be achieved? We believe so, and if the passion with which everyone interviewed has spoken about the chef profession can be channelled positively, then there is no reason to think it can't.

*“ I think the problem is all these people in the industry, especially older-school people. They're not moving forward with the times, but they keep saying: “We want passionate people, I want somebody who's motivated to come into work. I want somebody who's this, and that.”*

*“They're not looking at what is it that they are doing wrong and what is it that they need to change within themselves to ensure that they create a happy, motivated team. People don't just become motivated about things, you have to excite them.*

*“Again, it's that level of communication. These chefs are saying, “We want passionate people.” They're blaming the industry and the young people that are coming through, but if we do not evolve ourselves as the managers and mentors and leaders that we are, if we don't evolve to adapt to the people that are coming through the industry now, then you're never going to motivate, and you're never going to retain.*

*“So we can sit here and keep saying: “Oh, it's not like it used to be in our day and people just aren't the same.” No, they're not the same. Society has changed, and so must we.”*

– **Recruitment agency**

# About People 1st

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**People 1st**  
Hospitality House  
First Floor  
11-59 High Road  
East Finchley  
London  
N2 8AB

 020 3074 1212

 [info@people1st.co.uk](mailto:info@people1st.co.uk)

 @p1stgroup

 People 1st

 [www.people1st.co.uk](http://www.people1st.co.uk)