

Tackling the skills crisis

Is the sector doing enough to attract, nurture and retain talent? And what can trade bodies and suppliers do to help?



Setting the scene

Bob Cotton: We've been extremely fortunate that the sector has continued to grow year-on-year since the '60s. We even continued to grow throughout the financial crisis of 2008, whereas most other industries had a blip. With this growth we've seen some big positives. There are an enormous number of people employed in the sector now - around the two million mark. The range of opportunities is extraordinary and standards have risen. But the sheer number of good restaurants has created the biggest skills challenge we've ever had.

John Hyde: For once can we start at the top rather than the bottom. Usually the focus is on bringing people into the industry. What we need is more hospitality trained people running these businesses, not accountants. In 1999, when I was president of what is now called the Institute of Hospitality, I looked at whether we should have a licence to practise. That would stop the rise of people that are only interested in the bottom line.

BC: That would work fine for big companies but it would be very hard to put it into an industry that is made up of 90% small businesses. But I do agree we need people in leadership positions that are trained in hospitality and have a good understanding of the sector.

Vic Laws: We're not an industry. We're a profession.

BC: The skills challenge is causing a huge productivity issue and is one of the sector's key concerns. One of my last jobs in Government was getting the funding for and carrying out a survey on productivity. The findings were that our productivity is well adrift of other European countries. The main reason is our lack of investment in training. The best companies in the UK are spending 1% of their payroll on training and developing staff. The Germans spend 4%. When times are tough, UK employers say they

can't afford to do training. In the good times, they say they're too busy.

The catering colleges

Andrew Green: A lot of young people I speak to at catering colleges are disillusioned. They don't even know what courses they're on because they change halfway through. Thirty years ago we had great lecturers and one awarding body (City & Guilds).

JH: The number of catering colleges in the UK is declining rapidly.

Mark Rigby: Chefs are still turning vegetables at colleges - how many restaurants still serve turned vegetables?

AG: Some colleges play the numbers game because the way they're financed forces them to do so. Quantity is not good for quality.

JH: They take too long to train chefs. The army trains its chefs in 12 weeks, the hospitality industry does it in a year. It takes three years in catering colleges. Those that do make it to the end of the course can become so disillusioned that they don't last long in the industry.

VL: There was a university that wanted its chef

lecturers to have a PhD. Unsurprisingly, it didn't happen. Chefs need to be able to cook and to transfer that knowledge to others.

Getting young people into the industry

Ceri Wilmott: What about schools? When I was at school, everybody had to do home economics. There's not enough of a focus on hospitality and food in schools.

BC: Historically, every school had a careers' officer and it was a really specialised job. They knew which skills were needed in particular sectors. If you go to schools now, that role has disappeared and careers advice comes from people that aren't specialists.

JH: Schools are not geared towards getting young people ready to work. They're geared towards getting young people ready for university. The new apprenticeship levy will be really important. Schools will be encouraged to put more of their pupils on to apprenticeships.

BC: It's nice to have cookery back on the curriculum. But practical cooking courses are the most expensive course to run. You need space, equipment and ingredients. I'm sure the very best schools will embrace it and do it well. But that will just be 10%, what will happen in the rest of the schools?



Apprenticeships

JH: Apprenticeships haven't changed. They've always been about giving a craftsman the skills to do their job. The way the Government funds them has changed but the outcome is the same: a competent chef, bar person or waiter. An apprenticeship is a partnership between the learner, the employer and the training provider. If all three of them are enthusiastic it works, if two out of three of them are enthusiastic it works OK. You only have a problem if people are



Turning the tables: sector leaders discuss staffing problems

Round the table

Bob Cotton
Chair



Martin Eshelby
Food innovation manager
Bidvest Foodservice



Andrew Green
Director of operations
Craft Guild of Chefs



John Hyde
Executive chairman
HIT Training



Richard Jones
Sales director
McCain



Vic Laws
Chaîne des Rôtisseurs



Mark Lyddy
Former head of foodservice
Tilda



Mark Rigby
Executive chef
Premier Foods



Karis Thomas
PR and marketing communications manager
Bidvest Foodservice



Ceri Wilmott
Director of HR
Bidvest Foodservice



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forced to do it.

Poor working conditions

BC: One of the biggest problems the industry faces is how we treat people that are starting out in the business.

Mark Lyddy: This industry has a massive problem with staff retention. You can work hard trying to get people into the industry but if they don't stay, it's a waste of time. It's costing us a huge amount of money.

JH: The Millennial generation won't work 50 to 60 hours a week when they're only contracted to do 40.

Martin Eshelby: It's survival of the fittest. When I used to work at The Dorchester, there were chefs that would compete with each other on who could do the longest shift.

BC: People leave people, not companies. In my experience, if I was well managed personally, I didn't look to leave. If I was pissed off by my immediate boss, I'd go.

AG: In this business, sometimes you're going to have to work through your break. The problem is that making people work more than they are contracted to has become the norm.

Richard Jones: It's important to understand that these recruitment headaches are the same in many other industries. There are also some fundamental changes in the industry that are causing these problems. Not least the rise of the casual dining, which typically requires less skill.

Karis Thomas: There's an opposite problem with zero-hours contracts, which have increased greatly in recent years. They work well for people that are using hospitality as a stopgap but they're not a good fit for anyone that's trying to have a career in the industry. They also make people view the industry negatively.

BC: Once they get onto the management ladder, industry rates are highly competitive. It's the lower rungs that are the issue.

BC: It does irritate me a little that people are so quick to blame the Government and the colleges. As employers, we have a duty to do something about these skills-related challenges.

ME: We're competing with so many other sectors, for example, the telecommunications industry. Our industry has issues. Hotels and restaurants sometimes don't treat their staff very well. In the early '90s when they brought in the EU working time directive, employers got round it by getting their staff to sign away their rights. There's very little in our industry that supports the individual.

CW: The sector needs to get better at tapping into segments of the population that does want to work part time. I'm being a bit old fashioned but there are a lot of mothers that want to work for example. How are we encouraging them into the industry?

KT: I have a friend who works in the hospitality industry from 5.30am to 9am so she can be with her children when they've got up. Antisocial hours for some but it suits her.

RJ: Where are the brilliant case studies we have about working in this sector. Once we find them, how do we promote and highlight these great examples?

The image of the hospitality industry

BC: The food supply sector has a different image. Careers at Nestlé and Unilever are viewed very differently.

ME: The problem is that we promote the job, not the great career it might lead to.



JH: A lot of finance-related companies are being quite smart and realising that a lot of bright kids that have just done their A-levels don't want a £50,000 university debt. They're running level four and level five apprenticeship programmes and these talented young people are coming out with the same qualifications as they'd get at university, but they also have four years hands-on practical experience. Why aren't the big hotel chains doing this?

KT: One of the problems is that people think of hospitality as being a casual job. They don't see it as a career.

ME: As a nation, we don't respect food in the same way as our European counterparts and therefore the public don't respect chefs as much.

BC: Seventy per cent of all ex-university students have worked in the hospitality sector at some point. It turned them off the sector for life.

Contract catering

VL: That's not quite right. A lot of the people that worked in the sector as students were recruited. But the sector that has really got it right is contract catering. They're doing a lot of apprenticeships because there's a decent career path in place.

BC: The contract catering sector has invested a lot of time in planning proper career paths and the sector is more attractive because much of the work is Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. Working conditions are often a reflection of the site - and

by that I mean the client - so they're often better than other parts of the hospitality industry.

VL: The past two winners of the Gold Scholarship competition have been from the contract catering sector so the skills are there.

Bringing the industry together

JH: We tried to bring all the different stakeholders together three years ago with the Hospitality Guild but it fell apart. We're too fragmented to get anything done. Although personalities came into it too.

BC: The hospitality industry is too big a conglomerate. It's lots of different industries with different needs. We need different solutions for different sectors.

Moving forwards

RJ: We've identified a lot of issues, what are we going to do about them?

BC: There are clearly a lot of companies and indeed trade organisations that aren't being particularly successful in what they do. We have 15 to 20 bodies representing the interests of a number of different parts of the hospitality industry. Some represent the professional element, some might represent the big corporates. Fundamentally, they're all representing different bits. There's no body that represents the industry as a whole. That's always been the problem.

RJ: Are they having a similar conversation?

BC: No, because they're all looking after what I'd term their own sectional interests. They tried it with the Hospitality Guild and it didn't work. I point the finger at big companies. At the end of the day, someone has to take the lead. The big companies need to come together and work on behalf of the industry. Chairmen are the people to target because they tend to take a more long-term view than the CEO who is usually only

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worried about that year's budget.

VL: But there's no point getting young professionals into the industry if the industry continues to treat them badly.

MR: In reality, if you're a person who is going to work 16 hours a day, you'll continue to do that whatever role you take.

JH: The industry needs to use local labour alongside that from Europe and indeed further afield. They need to make recruitment policies and working conditions as attractive as they are in other sectors. I'd tell the Government to go away please, the least involvement they have the better.

ML: We need to keep people by treating them well. The average productivity in catering is 50% behind retail. That's because the conditions aren't as good and there's big staff churn.

ME: I think it's about giving opportunities and choice to people. I've come from chef background and product development. A lot of people don't know what opportunities are out there. Bringing the various bodies together would help enormously.

MR: Long term, I'd like to see catering become a professional vocation. I'd like to be able to achieve the same level as a doctor, accountant or lawyer. We need a framework that pulls the industry up and gives us more respect.

AG: Hospitality needs to be looked at as a vocation rather than being 'just a job'. It's a career, and people need to see their route through the industry.

RJ: We need to define what the issue is and engage with the key stakeholders. We need to get them aligned or nothing is going to happen.

CW: Children are our future but there's very little about food in the current curriculum. They have no knowledge to make informed choices about what they want to do.

VL: I think we need a minister for our own industry, someone to recognise the value of it. It brings in a huge amount for the Government. I work for The Clink. In the past four years, we've put 500 former prisoners into front-of-house and kitchen positions - 85% of them have not gone back to prison and 90% are still working in the industry. That's a great retention story. It's because they've been trained properly. □

Thanks to The Harcourt for hosting the roundtable discussion.

What is the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs?

Founded in Paris in 1950, the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs is an international gastronomic society dedicated to bringing together individuals from around the world who share an appreciation for cuisine, wine and fine dining. In an age of fast-food culture, the Chaîne aims to sustain the appreciation of high-quality food and drinks of all types and provide recognition for excellence.

With establishments in 60 countries and 45,000 members, its

history and tradition can be dated back as far as 1248 and continues to be promoted today through its extensive local, national and international events.

The Chaîne des Rôtisseurs holds an annual Young Chefs Competition, which is designed to support and celebrate aspiring chefs within the industry. Now in its 40th year, the International Young Chef Competition 2016 is being held in Manchester this September. Open to

young chefs, who are no more than 27 years old, the competition will see national finalists from all over the world come together to showcase their talent and creativity in a national arena.

As part of the company's commitment to supporting the development of young chefs in the UK, Bidvest Foodservice is a proud sponsor of the competition, along with some of its supplier partners.

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