

CENTRE FOR LONDON

Recipe for change: the case for a London College of Food

Nicolas Bosetti, Claire Harding and Mario Washington-Ihieme



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About the authors

Nicolas Bosetti

Nico is a Research Manager at Centre for London. He is chiefly interested in cities, governance and regional economic development, and at Centre for London he has co-authored reports on inequality and social mobility, city planning, and London after Brexit. Nico has an MSc in Urban Policy from the London School of Economics and Sciences Po Paris.

Claire Harding

Claire is Research Director at Centre for London. Before joining Centre for London she was the Head of Research at Coram Family and Childcare, where she led on the annual Childcare Surveys. She previously worked in research and development at digital mental health provider Big White Wall, and in public sector research consultancy. Her research interests include education and opportunity, wellbeing, equalities and gender.

Mario Washington-Ihieme

Mario is a Researcher at Centre for London. Her research interests include young people and employment, social mobility and cultural policy. Mario is also a Young Trustee for London Youth. Prior to joining the Centre in 2018, Mario was a Research and Policy Intern at Partnership for Young London and a Research Assistant at the London School of Economics in the Department of Management.

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Summary

London has one of the world's most creative and dynamic food scenes, but the capital suffers from longstanding weaknesses in culinary education:

- London has long struggled when it comes to developing native chef talent: the number of students on food courses and apprenticeships has been steadily falling, even as employers report persistent skills shortages.
- Brexit and immigration reform could well lead to a decline in the supply of migrant chefs – before the pandemic 85 per cent of London's chefs were born abroad, and 25 per cent came from the EU.
- London's kitchens are far from inclusive: only around 15 per cent of London's chefs are female, and only 12 per cent of head chefs in Michelin -starred restaurants are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background.
- Chef pay has stagnated or declined, relative to pay in other sectors, over recent decades. Working conditions in London's kitchens are often poor, with chefs complaining of long hours, hot and cramped workspaces and a macho culture.
- Both climate change and healthy lifestyles have become top policy concerns. We badly need more chefs with a better understanding of how to cook and prepare healthy and above all sustainable food.
- Existing culinary schools are strongly vocational in focus and have little capacity or resource for research, development and innovation.
- International examples show that falling learner numbers and declining investment in culinary training are not inevitable. Paris's Ecole Ferrandi has doubled the size of its anglophone course over the last decade, for example, and Singapore's Sunrice Academy is expanding.

COVID-19 in some respects changes the context but does not lessen the case for a rethink of culinary skills training:

- The pandemic has hit our hospitality sector especially hard and it will probably take some time to recover. But we will almost certainly see a return to growth over the medium to longer term – the number of jobs in accommodation and food services increased by 41 per cent between 2010 and 2019, compared to an increase of 25 per cent across London's economy as a whole. Without strengthening culinary training and education, chef shortages could well get worse.

London needs a new model for culinary training that can rise to the challenges it faces on workforce shortages, inclusion, social mobility and sustainability:

- London is a global education capital, with some of the best universities in the world, but its reputation does not extend to its food and cooking offer. Despite the longevity of London's cooking schools and the large size of some private training providers, these don't have anything like the standing of colleges in France and elsewhere, or of London's top art, design and fashion schools.
- Our aim should be to create a culinary skills system that opens up opportunity to people of all backgrounds.

- We need to ensure that our future chefs are confident in cooking sustainable and healthy food, with the skills and resilience to adapt to future changes in the way we cook and eat.
- We need to boost London's strengths as a centre of culinary research, development and innovation, developing capacities, for instance, to scope out consumer trends, assess the impact of innovative approaches to sourcing or hospitality management, or undertake research on nutrition and sustainability.

There are three main choices to make to fulfil the objectives set out above:

- **Mission:** whether to provide highly specialised training for a small group of learners, or more general training for a larger group.
- **Status:** whether to deliver courses as part of the further education (FE) system or the higher education system.
- **Structure:** whether to set up a new standalone institution or build on an existing institution or institutions.

We recommend building on the strengths of London's existing culinary training provision, by bringing them together in a network that would include a new centre of excellence offering advanced and specialised courses. While the parts of this network would remain independent, they could be branded as a new London College of Food.

This college would:

- Provide a range of entry-level and advanced courses: The hospitality sector requires a large increase in learners acquiring a broader range of culinary skills. This can only be achieved through offering a broad base of entry-level courses alongside a choice of specialised and more advanced courses in a new centre of excellence. We also need a more modular approach to training so that more working cooks and chefs can combine work and learning.
- Develop within the FE sector: A new higher education institution would be slow and expensive to set up and run, with fees that would deter many prospective learners, while it is perfectly possible to create a world class centre of excellence within the FE framework.
- Operate on a 'centre and satellite' model: The new central institution, which could be sponsored or developed by an existing institution, would offer a wider range and more advanced courses than anything London's FE providers offer now. In time it should develop into a world class teaching and research institution, attracting students from across the country and beyond. The satellites would be made up of existing local culinary colleges and courses, teaching basic or entry level skills.
- Be governed by a board: The board would be made up of the various learning providers within the new college. It would have an informal, coordinating power, though in time some of the courses and colleges involved might want to federate and become a single body.

We recommend the following plan for creating the new college:

- Organisations with an interest in creating the new College of Food should form a group, whose mission will be to complete preparatory work on branding and identity, fundraising, course architecture and qualification award.
- This work should be supported and seed-funded by the Mayor of London, the government, and trusts, foundations and social investors interested in food skills and sustainability.

Introduction: Supporting a hospitality bounce back

In 2019, Centre for London published *Kitchen Talent*.¹ This report looked at reasons behind the persisting skills gap in London's professional kitchens and set out proposals to strengthen culinary education, increase retention, and improve pay and conditions for cooks and chefs. Among other proposals, the report argued that London would benefit from a College of Food – a new high status, public institution that would raise the standing of the culinary profession, appeal to aspirant cooks in both London and beyond, widen the range of courses taught and become a centre of research and innovation in food and cooking.

Of all the proposals in our report, this clearly resonated most. This idea was welcomed by the Greater London Authority and the hospitality sector. Against that background, this report looks in more detail at what role the College of Food could play, how it should operate, what its relationship should be to existing colleges and courses, and how it could be established and funded.

Shortly after we began working on this report, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK, with devastating consequences for the hospitality sector. Both in London and across the UK, hospitality businesses made more use of the Job Retention Scheme than any other sector, with around three quarters of jobs furloughed.²

At the time of writing, the extreme disruption of COVID-19 looks set to continue, with social distancing rules in place for at least a year. Many businesses will close and the whole hospitality sector is likely to take time to recover – and will no doubt look very different when it does come back.

But there are reasons to think that coronavirus will dent rather than permanently weaken London's culinary industry. Looking back at pre-pandemic trends, accommodation and food services were one of the fastest growing sectors in terms of employment and productivity.³ Looking at food businesses only, the number of restaurants, takeaways and street food businesses in London has increased by almost 50 per cent since 2001,⁴ and the number of chefs tripled between 2008 and 2018.⁵ The rate of growth may slow, but Londoners' enjoyment of food will not. On top of this, London's food scene is one of the city's greatest visitor attractions, and the number of visitors to London has grown quickly: the capital saw 21 million visits from overseas in 2019 – an increase of 50 per cent since 2009.⁶ Again, COVID-19 might slow this growth. We might even see a fall in visitor numbers. But once we are through the worst of the pandemic, the visitor economy is likely to remain strong. A College of Food would therefore support job creation after the pandemic: as the hospitality sector returns to growth it could offer work opportunities to people considering a career change, but there will need to be a structure in place to support their reskilling.

There are, however, very difficult times ahead: businesses will have to work harder to meet consumer expectations on quality, sustainability and good value. Indeed, COVID-19 may usher deep, and perhaps more positive changes in our appreciation of food, as many spend more time cooking at home. Efforts to reduce contamination in response to the pandemic could also accelerate automation of food preparation – many cooks could see their roles redefined as the more repetitive tasks are performed by robots. Finally, the climate emergency and intensifying habitat and species decline are already contributing to rising awareness of the impact of food on our environment.

To innovate and return to growth, businesses will need a skilled workforce, and London has been short of chefs and cooks for years if not decades. Our *Kitchen Talent* report found that the city isn't training nearly enough chefs to meet demand.⁷ With 85 per cent of London's chefs born abroad and over a quarter of them from the EU, London's food scene is largely reliant on migration.

In this context Brexit and associated reforms to migration policy are likely to add pressure onto recruitment, and without a step change in London's training offer, the shortage of chefs and cooks is likely to persist or worsen.

We therefore think that COVID-19 in some respects changes the context, but does not lessen the case for a rethink of London's culinary skills training. It is the right time to invest in the recovery of this dynamic, economically and culturally vital industry.

1. Culinary training in London



We must recognise that cooks, chefs and food artisans learn their trade in a variety of ways. Some prefer formal study and attend a cookery course. Learning on the job is also common. This section looks at the routes to becoming a cook in London, and how the training offer has developed over time.

Cookery schools

London's cookery schools have a long history. The National Bakery School was set up in 1894 and is considered the 'first bakery school in the world'. The Westminster School of Hospitality and Le Cordon Bleu London were founded in 1910 and 1931 respectively, to ready cooks for the capitals' prestigious restaurants and hotels,⁸ but their aim was much more significant than this. These schools were borne out of a movement to codify, modernise and pass on the technical skills of Western European palace cooking. Up until then cooking was considered a lesser 'domestic art' and these schools successfully managed to professionalise it. Today these schools make quite distinct offers.

The Westminster School of Hospitality is now part of London's largest further education college, Capital City College Group, which delivers courses in dozens of other disciplines. As London's hospitality sector expanded, more further education colleges started offering culinary courses – 15 additional colleges across London offer these, though as the next section shows, attracting learners is a struggle. Public funding means that some learners are entitled to having their college course funded. However this is only available to people without a level 2 qualification (that is without the equivalent of core GCSEs) and some younger learners.

The National Bakery School has been absorbed into London South Bank University and teaches degrees in baking science. Over the last decade, there has been a flurry of graduate level courses designed for hospitality professions. The LSBU is one of several universities to offer three year graduate courses in hospitality management, alongside the University of West London, University of East London, Greenwich University and Middlesex. Other London universities teach degrees in food policy – SOAS and City University opened food studies centres in 2013, encompassing research and teaching. These university courses are funded by tuition fees and government grants, but they usually don't teach food preparation.

By contrast Le Cordon Bleu remains an independent or private school, and more have been created since, such as Leith's School of Food and Wine. These, however, do not benefit from public funds and learners have to bear the full cost of courses, which range from £20,000 to £24,500 for a one year full-time professional course. Whilst these courses provide a high standard of education, with students getting lots of contact with teachers, they are a costly investment and are geared towards international students – over 80 per cent of students Le Cordon Bleu London are from overseas.⁹

Learning on the job

Learning on the job is also common, sometimes with the aim to learn from a particular cook, in a similar way to training in other arts and crafts. It is possible to walk into a professional kitchen with a passion and get a job as a prep cook or a catering assistant, and progress quickly to more senior roles.

While a strong element of practical learning is essential to becoming a cook, there are drawbacks to learning it all on the job. Recruits are too often thrown into a difficult learning environment without much preparation or support and end up leaving quickly.

Apprenticeships offer a formal framework for on-the-job learning, and over the decades the government has developed standardised programmes for most jobs with technical skills requirements. But as a government-led scheme they were considered to include too little commitment from

employers and many were of poor quality as a result.¹⁰ Learners have also increasingly valued formal study, particularly on leaving school, which has led the popularity of apprenticeships to progressively decline. A 2017 reform of the scheme introduced an Apprenticeship Levy that shifted the responsibility for funding the costs of apprenticeships onto large employers (those with an annual wage bill of £3 million plus), with employers paying for a day a week's worth of learning outside the workplace. This training is often delivered by private training providers entering contracts with employers – although further education colleges can and do also provide apprenticeship training. Still, some have raised alarm at the continued drop in apprenticeship starts since 2017,¹¹ as well as high drop-out rates – although beyond the focus of this report, it is essential for these issues to be addressed.

Fortunately, the coming years are also set to bring new opportunities to seriously rethink food teaching and training in London. The government has made funding available for free tuition to adults without level 3 qualifications (A-levels or equivalent) across the UK (though this has yet to be extended to hospitality training). In London, the Mayor now controls spending from the Adult Education Budget, worth over £300 million, and has made it a key objective to improve the offer of technical skills by 'raising the quality of facilities, teaching and leadership in London's further and adult education sector, promote the sector's specialisms and ensure its sustainability'.¹² We could also see new sources of funding for catering and food colleges. The City of London Corporation is proposing to bring together its Billingsgate, New Spitalfields and Smithfield wholesale markets as a single new complex at Dagenham Dock, which could well include new teaching facilities. And the City of Westminster is considering supporting Westminster Kingsway College to develop its Soho campus.

International examples suggest that if we get the offer right, there could be a big market for culinary colleges. Paris-based Ecole Ferrandi has doubled the size of its anglophone course over the last decade, for example, and Singapore's Sunrice Academy is expanding.

2. Strategic objectives



London needs a new model for culinary training that can rise to the challenges facing the city – of job creation, inclusion, social mobility and sustainability – and support its recovery from the double disruption of COVID-19 and Brexit. This section shows why the existing model isn't working and details the five main reasons why it is time to take a fresh approach to culinary training:

1. **Nurture local talent** into professional cooking to reverse falling course take-up and give cooks the skills that restaurants and caterers need.
2. **Promote inclusivity** in a sector where women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Londoners struggle to progress.
3. **Attract investment** to repair the longstanding under-funding of culinary education, and boost London and the UK's role as a centre for food research and innovation.
4. **Drive sustainability** by improving cooks' understanding of the issues and solutions to the environmental costs of cooking and diet.
5. **Raise employment standards** to improve workforce attrition rates, by training a new generation of chefs and cooks on how to tackle workplace discrimination and poor wellbeing.

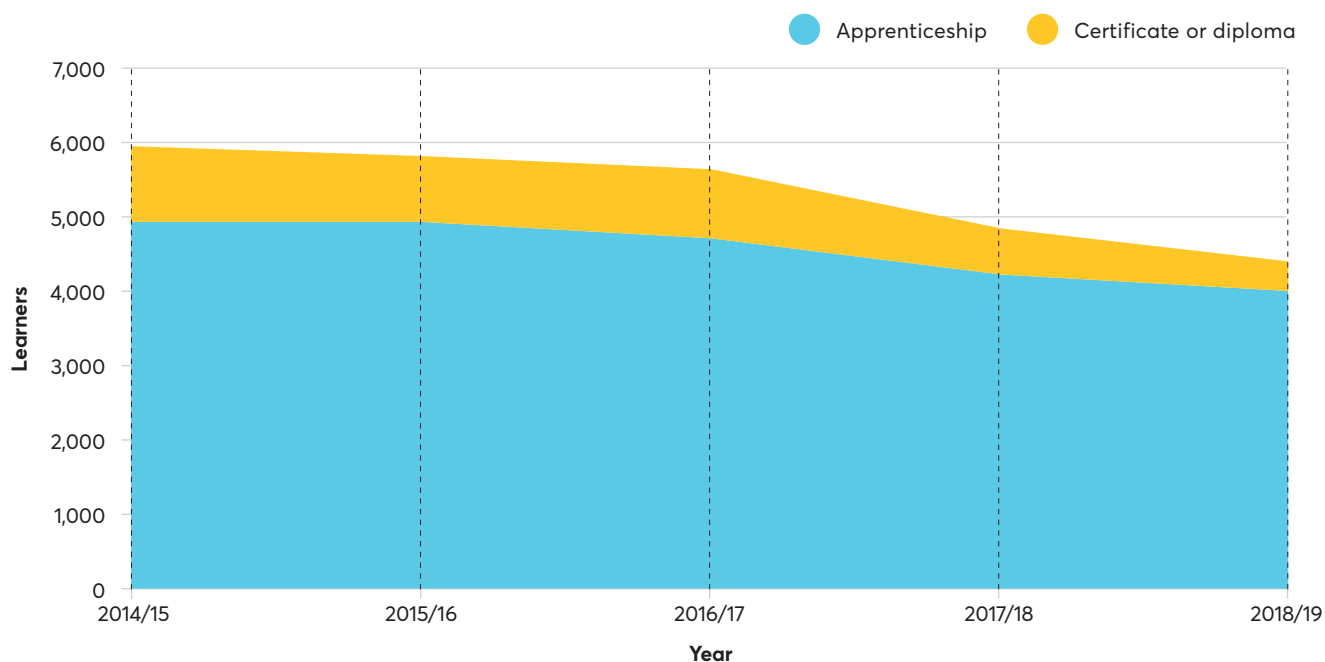
This section sets out the College of Food's strategic objectives in turn.

1. Nurture local talent

London has successfully established itself as a global culinary hotspot, with considerable growth in the scale, quality and diversity of its food scene.¹³

The number of people on publicly-funded chef courses has steadily declined, as shown in Figure 1. We have been told by senior college staff that fewer people have been applying to chef courses at London's further education colleges in recent years, and at least one London institution, the University of West London, discontinued its chef courses in 2020.

Figure 1: Participation in hospitality and catering courses - London



Source: Department for Education (2020). Participation in apprenticeships and in education and training. Apprenticeship data includes the following frameworks or standards: advanced butcher, baker, butcher, chef de partie, commis chef, fishmonger, hospitality and catering, hospitality management, hospitality manager, hospitality supervisor, hospitality team member, senior production chef. Education and training data includes all certificates and diplomas in professional cookery and patisserie.

Take up of apprenticeships has been falling too (see Tables 1 and 2). This might seem surprising as apprenticeships are an attractive opportunity for all parties, with learners paid throughout and training tailored to the needs of the employer. Part of the reason for decline might be the relatively slow take up of the Apprenticeship Levy, which shifted the responsibility to fund apprenticeships from the government to large employers. But the last few decades have also seen a broader societal shift away from training on the job and a preference for formal study, which could explain why appeal to learners has so far been limited.

Table 1 and 2: Hospitality employment and learner numbers

Programme	London learner numbers - 2019/20*
'Hospitality and catering' apprenticeship	2,186
Hospitality apprenticeship – no cookery	1,476
Chef de partie or commis chef apprenticeship	542
Professional cookery, chef or patisserie diploma	399
Cookery or patisserie training from a private culinary school	350+
Butcher apprenticeship	22
Baker apprenticeship	11
Fishmonger apprenticeship	3

* Or latest year available

Source: Department for Education

Occupation	Estimated London employment	Learners per 100 jobs
Kitchen and catering assistants	48,200	3-4*
Chefs	39,300	
Cooks	7,300	
Waiters and waitresses	39,400	2
Bar staff	17,500	
Catering and bar managers	7,400	
Butchers	1,400	1.6
Bakers and flour confectioners	5,100	0.2
Fishmongers and poultry dressers	N/A	N/A

*The higher value includes private cooking schools

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey 2016-17

Instead the capital relies on foreign workers and particularly EU nationals, who make up around 25 per cent of the city's professional chefs – a much higher number than for any other region in the UK,¹⁴ and one that leaves the city's hospitality businesses particularly vulnerable to Brexit.

The government's new immigration reforms are likely to reduce London's access to foreign chefs. The proposed system consists of a points-based immigration system where those wanting to work in the UK need to score a certain number of points to be eligible for a visa. Applicants who do not have academic degrees are likely to score poorly.

2. Promote inclusivity

Despite relatively low barriers to entry and progression in terms of qualifications, professional kitchens are too often exclusive places. They have also long suffered from being dominated by men, as few managers make arrangements to allow flexible working, take on the macho culture of many kitchens, or address other forms of gender-based discrimination.¹⁵ Whilst the situation is changing and colleges and training programmes now have a better gender balance, women still only make up 15 per cent of London's chefs.¹⁶

There is also strong evidence that upwards mobility for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Londoners is relatively poor. London's professional kitchens are diverse in terms of ethnic background, but BAME representation is very low in more senior roles. Only 12 per cent of Michelin starred chefs are from BAME backgrounds.¹⁷ It seems that BAME chefs are often in jobs which reflect their national background (chefs of Indian heritage in Indian restaurants) rather than having access to broader opportunities. The lack of BAME representation in professional kitchens could stem from top chefs being predominantly White and male, and chefs routinely describe how work placements often expose trainees to sexist and racist behaviour and attitudes.¹⁸

"Many of the top chefs in the UK are well aware of the bias against BAME chefs and front of house staff in the industry but simply turn a blind eye. Conversely the BAME employees have no outlet to report ill treatment. Any institution needs to bear these factors in mind and have the process to nurture and encourage people from all ethnic and social backgrounds to take up this trade as a credible long term career."

London chef and restaurateur

London's food training institutions were also borne out of the Western European cooking tradition, and while some of them have since diversified their curriculum, the Western tradition continues to dominate. This is a missed opportunity, given London's character as a global capital. There are few better places in the world than London to develop a wider, more global curricula, encompassing South Asian, West African or Caribbean cooking traditions.

Some charities are doing excellent work to improve access to hospitality careers for people with challenging life circumstances. For example, Blue Marble Training delivered by the Shoreditch Trust in East London offers young people wraparound support while on their course and after completing it – including on mental health, financial resilience and personal confidence in the workplace. There is much that the College of Food could learn from such programmes to broaden access to employment in professional kitchens.

3. Attract investment

It is remarkable that London is a global centre for education across disciplines but has a comparatively low profile in food and cooking training. In spite of the longevity of London's cooking schools and the large size of some private training providers, none have much of a global reputation.

There are three main reasons for this:

Low status

First, cooking has a lower status in the UK than in many other countries. In France, for instance, the culinary arts are viewed as a creative industry with the same standing as design and fashion. But cooking has tended to be viewed in the UK as a 'domestic science' rather than an arts subject, with the result that its food schools have never had much status. You only have to look at the contrast between the reputation and standing of Central St Martins or the Royal College of Art, and London's catering colleges to get the point.

Underfunding

The lack of status accorded to the culinary arts is compounded by the underfunding of vocational education. The UK has long neglected further or vocational education, and never more so than in recent years. Culinary education is no exception. In the UK most cooking qualifications are taught as part of vocational education in further education colleges, which have seen the largest fall in spending per learner than in any other part of the education system since 2010 (larger than primary and secondary schools, and higher education).¹⁹ Total spending on further education for young people aged 16 to 18 has fallen by 25 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2019, while spending on apprenticeships and other work-based learning for adults has fallen since 2009–10 by about 18 per cent in real terms. We do not have specific figures for hospitality courses in further education, but we know they will have been affected by both a reduction in the number of learners, and a reduction in spending per learner.

Atomisation

Finally, as outlined in the previous section, most of London's culinary schools are also part of bigger institutions and their reputations are rolled up into theirs. To survive, schools have had to find their 'niche' audience or segment of learners (e.g. international students for Le Cordon Bleu, tuition-funded university degrees for the National Bakery School). Contrast this with Paris' Ecole Ferrandi or Copenhagen's hospitality college, which have built considerable reputation from joining up vocational teaching, courses for professionals and international students into a single, large institution (see Appendix). There is also an instructive contrast with London's arts colleges, several of which joined forces to become the world leading University of the Arts London.

Public sector under funding and atomisation taken together do not provide an attractive environment to private capital. Hospitality is an atypical sector in that it is made up mostly of small and medium sized enterprises that often operate on tight margins. And whilst interviewees speak of tight connections and collegiality, and some chefs give back by creating local culinary skills initiatives, such as Nicole Pisani's work for Chef in Schools²⁰ or Asma Khan opening her restaurant kitchen to novices for free,²¹ there also needs to be a more strategic approach to investment in training. Restaurateurs spend time training new recruits to their own techniques, but there lacks the structure to bring together corporate investment into education, and connect restaurants and caterers with colleges.

The lack of investment and atomisation also means that London lacks

an obvious home for a food research and development institute, which could scope out consumer trends, assess impact of innovative approaches to sourcing or hospitality management, or steer university research projects on nutrition and sustainability. Indeed, several London universities are conducting research in food policy, nutrition and hospitality – there is an opportunity to do leading research and development into food and hospitality at a larger scale, in partnership with businesses. The College of Food could therefore become a centre of excellence in research as well as teaching.

To conclude, we believe that a world-leading food education institution has the potential to repair some of these gaps by bringing together public sector funding and leveraging it with international student fees and corporate contributions.

4. Drive sustainability

We won't be able to tackle the climate emergency or the other environmental challenges we face without changing the way we cook and eat.

For this reason, sustainability needs to be put at the centre of culinary education and training – all the more so because consumers increasingly demand sustainable, ethically produced food. But while most culinary courses and schools now teach about healthy eating, there is much less emphasis on sustainable eating. Where colleges do offer training on sustainability, this tends to be as a separate, non-compulsory module, among many others. It is time for a step change in the way we teach food skills and cheffing by embedding sustainability into all courses.

"London restaurants are experimenting with zero waste, low-carbon and highly nutritious menus, but this kind of innovation isn't really reflected in culinary training programmes. Too often sustainability is taught as a box-ticking exercise, rather than to give cooks the confidence to make sustainable choices when elaborating recipes or sourcing ingredients. As the hospitality sector resets after the pandemic, it has the opportunity to be at the heart of a green recovery and help the UK reach our Net Zero targets in 2050. But for this to happen we need to give chefs the tools to respond to rapidly increasing consumer demand for eating out options that are sustainable."

Juliane Caillouette Noble, Managing Director, The Sustainable Restaurant Association

5. Raise employment standards

Whilst employers are best placed to improve some of the lagging working standards in London's professional kitchens (as documented in [*Kitchen Talent*](#)), training the next generation of cooks, chefs and managers to tackle these challenges will also play an important part.

Long hours and stress can lead to mental health problems like anxiety and depression. In a survey of professional chefs in London, conducted by trade union Unite, 51 per cent reported that they suffered from depression due to being overworked, while 69 percent reported that their hours impact their health. Undoubtedly, this contributes to retention issues in the sector. Courses currently focus on delivering the practical skills to work in a kitchen, rather than preparing aspiring chefs for challenges like long hours and high pressure. While some of these issues must be tackled in the workplace and by the sector as a whole, there also needs to be much greater emphasis on helping learners to manage their health and wellbeing in difficult circumstances, and to be effective and empathetic managers as they move up the career ladder.

"There is a whole generation that needs support getting into a kitchen and finding their place there. The environment is harsh. If you make a mistake, other chefs feel you are letting them down. What struck me is that there is low self-worth and self-esteem [in professional kitchens], and chefs project this on each other. So I decided I should leave."

Former chef

The College of Food should work in partnership with training providers focused on improving mental health and wellbeing in hospitality, such as Pilotlight, to learn from many existing excellent initiatives. The College could provide professional support and a base for their programmes.

Table 3: Summary of opportunities to improve culinary training

Strategic objectives	Opportunities
Nurture talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a recognised institution that attracts learners from UK and abroad; • Contribute to the professionalisation of cooking and food roles.
Promote inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide free tuition to those who need it; • Expand curriculum and increase the diversity of teaching staff, to reflect the diversity of cooking techniques and traditions.
Attract investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase and diversify funding of culinary education (e.g. trusts and foundations, social investment, corporate social responsibility); • Boost the research and innovation capacity of culinary colleges, so growingw their income and enabling them to attract talent and help solve social, economic and environmental challenges.
Drive sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote more sustainable approaches to cooking and eating.
Raise employment standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve standards of management and awareness of mental health and wellbeing.

3. Options for a new College of Food



There are a range of choices about how the College of Food can fulfil the objectives set out above. In summary, we need to decide:

- **Mission:** whether it provides highly specialised training for a small group of learners or more general training for a larger group;
- **Status:** whether it is part of the further education system or the higher education system;
- **Structure:** whether it is run as a new standalone institution or set up as part of a network or consortium.

This section rates six set up options against four criteria:

- **Prestige:** creating a high-status institution able to attract talent and investment from across the UK and beyond;
- **Inclusivity:** creating an inclusive institution that attracts students from a broad range of backgrounds, including people from poorer backgrounds, women and ethnic minorities;
- **Upfront costs:** minimising set up costs;
- **Running costs:** minimising running costs.

Table 4: Key options: trade-off analysis

Aspect	Option	Prestige	Inclusivity	Upfront costs	Running costs
Mission	High level courses	Higher	Lower	Limited difference	Limited difference
	Entry level courses	Lower	Higher		
Status	Higher education	Higher	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Further education	Lower	Lower	Lower	Lower
Structure	Single institution	Higher	Lower	Higher	Depends on model
	Network	Lower	Higher	Lower	

Mission: scale and specialisation

We need a system of culinary education that provides more chefs with basic skills and more opportunities to acquire advanced and specialist skills.

Culinary skills training can cover a vast range of skills – from universal requirements like food hygiene to very specialist training in cooking techniques and traditions, and indeed training on how to run a successful business.

In terms of the qualifications framework (see Table 5), most culinary training stretches from basic level 2 to advanced level 6. This framework is not perfect for skills-based learning, as some training will reach the level of a degree course in terms of skills required but will be much shorter.

There are clear trade-offs between offering entry-level and high-level courses, in terms of cost, prestige and inclusion. In general, more elementary courses will be delivered to more students – so there is the potential to generate high volumes of work and achieve economies of scale. However, they tend to be shorter, so the ratio of effort in recruitment to time spent

with each student will be lower, and there is less opportunity to build up relationships with a learner over time. Providing higher level courses reduces the potential number of students and also reduces the ability to attract entirely new entrants to the profession, but may be more effective in building prestige and addressing shortages for specific skills. Indeed there is a need for training which is fairly advanced but is not delivered within the highly specialist and expensive private cooking schools.

Status: further education or higher education?

Post-16 education in the UK is categorised as either higher education or further education. Historically, higher education has been seen as more academic, more prestigious and less suited to vocational subjects, but the distinction in learning areas has broken down somewhat in the last few decades. New universities in particular offer a broader range of vocational learning, and many colleges offer academic routes. It is however rare for further education colleges to enjoy the same prestige as universities, and especially older universities.

The lowest level for formal higher education qualification is a foundation degree (two years of full time study) and most first-time students at HE institutions study for bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degrees, which last for three years. This means universities do not have much flexibility to meet the short term needs of employers. Shorter courses at masters or post-graduate certificate level are only available to people who already have an undergraduate degree. Universities are free to offer courses at less than degree level, for example summer short courses, but these usually only lead to a certificate of attendance, are not formally examined, and students can't usually secure grants for them.

Universities have the power to define and award their own qualifications, subject to some regulation and moderation, to ensure that qualifications from different providers are broadly equivalent. But setting up a new course from scratch comes with costs.

Further education offers a much wider range of qualifications – from below GCSE level (school-leaving qualifications for 16 year olds) to the equivalent of a master's degree. They also provide the classroom based learning element for most apprenticeships. Courses vary widely in length and time commitment, from a few hours a week over a few months to a year or more full time. Like universities, they can also choose to provide non-accredited short courses, either for personal enjoyment or for career development.

Table 5: Qualification Levels and Examples: England 2020

Level examples	
8	Doctorate
7	Master's degree (MA, MSc, MEng, MBA), PGCE
6	Bachelor's degree (BA, BSc), degree apprenticeships
5	Foundation degree, HND, DipHE
4	HNC, full Accounting Technician qualification
3	A levels, BTEC diplomas, City & Guilds trade Diplomas
2	GCSEs at grades A-C/9-4; Level 2 occupational qualifications
1	GCSEs at D-G/3-1 Entry level

Source: [Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#)

A key difference between further and higher education is how awarding powers work. Further education colleges offer courses which are accredited by an examination board like Edexcel or AQA. For many qualifications there will be several boards to choose from with slightly different course content. This means that colleges have less control over what they teach than universities, but they also have less work to do to develop and define their courses. It can be possible to start teaching a qualification new to the institution very quickly and setting up a new institution is also comparatively easy. It also means that the college does not need to persuade employers or learners of the value of their course, as in principle a T-level qualification in a given subject is the same wherever it is taught. For learners, this makes it possible to collect a linked set of qualifications from a number of different institutions – something which you cannot do at the higher education level.

Examination boards try to follow the needs of education providers, employers, and government policy in defining their qualifications: it is possible to advocate for changes to a qualification or for the creation of a new one. It is also possible – for a fee – to develop a qualification solely for a single organisation to examine and award. This is sometimes done by organisations who provide volunteering and employment opportunities and want to specifically recognise the learning people have done through their work.

Student finance is different for colleges and universities and this affects student experience. Full time undergraduate students studying for their first degree are entitled to loans to cover their tuition fees and their living costs. These are repaid through payroll at a fairly generous rate of interest, meaning that in practice many do not pay them off by the time the debt is written off. These loans are not available to further education students. There are some options for career development loans but these operate at a fairly small scale. However, because further education courses are generally shorter and often cheaper – and because some learners are entitled to have their fees paid by government – the overall cost of learning tends to be lower.

The funding of institutions themselves, as distinct from student fees, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Institutes of Technology (IoT)

The government is funding ‘Institutes of Technology’, which are collaborations between further education colleges and universities to develop technical skills courses in scientific subjects. London institutions have already bid and won two of these IoTs, and government funding rules mean that others should be created elsewhere in the UK, so other cities may wish to use this opportunity to set up a specialist centre of technology for food and hospitality.

Structure: a standalone institution or a network

In the past, setting up a new college meant building – or at least renting and fitting out – a new physical space. This was usually the model for new colleges and universities in the 18th to 20th centuries, although some initially used temporary or informal spaces before they were able to raise the funds for a site. There have been some examples of recent new institutions occupying their own new buildings – such as the Ada College of Digital Skills – but this is now relatively unusual.

The advantages of setting up a new building are clear: it gives an immediate and strong identity, is a statement of intent that this is a major project, and gives the institution far more control over its own operations than using spaces which are controlled by other people. Building an impressive new building in a central location also has the potential to raise the prestige of culinary skills in general.

However, the challenges of doing this are significant. London property prices mean that purchasing a building or site of sufficient size would require

huge investment: the Ada College of Digital Skills received £40 million in capital funding.²² These costs would be much higher than for many other types of learning because of the expense of kitchen equipment and the space required to use it. Fundraising, purchasing and fitting out a site would take several years at least, and this could be a distraction from the immediate change needed in culinary education.

There are also challenges for students with a single-site model, and these would fall more on those with less money. London is large, and any site chosen would inevitably require a long journey across the city for many people. Travelling by public transport is expensive for people on limited budgets. Time spent travelling also eats into caring commitments or part time work. Only offering training on one site risks embedding rather than reducing inequalities if lower income students cannot afford to get there.

For these reasons we think the new College of Food should take the form of a network, albeit one directed and governed in a unified way.

How a networked College of Food could work

There are several ways a network could work:

1. A quality mark delivered by a third party

Under this model, there is no change in structures – colleges continue to compete for learners – but colleges or courses that meet agreed standards of excellence are awarded a mark.

The Mayor of London's Construction Academies are a recent model of this. To address a lack of information on construction courses and their quality, the Mayor defined standards of good performance with employers and colleges, and awards a quality mark to colleges that meet those. Colleges re-apply for the standard every year. 24 London Colleges were awarded the Mayor's Quality Mark in 2019.

The mark 'levels up' course quality, and offers greater visibility, but does not consolidate the course offer nor does it create a unified brand. This model is easy to put in place, but if every college is awarded the quality mark (as not being awarded probably leads to decline), it wouldn't offer any distinctiveness.

2. A centre and satellite system

A centre and satellite model could combine the profile that comes with a lead institution, with the entry-level courses provided in colleges across the capital. The hub would be the lead campus of a new, informal College of Food – a natural home for advanced courses and international programmes, as well as public events and research and development. Local colleges across London would form satellites or spokes. These would provide foundation courses, foster and maintain relations with local employers, and engage with local schools.

This model would create a two-stage learning track: students would obtain a foundation course at their local college, providing basic skills and entry-level qualifications. These could be the first year of a two year vocational course (NVQ or T-level), or lower-level apprenticeships. Local colleges could also run taster classes for young people and work with school kitchens and cookery teachers.

Those who take a foundation course would then be guaranteed a place for a course at the 'central' institution, where they could develop more specialised skills.

This hub and spoke model is not untested. It is used for example in arts education, to allow people without previous experience to build a portfolio of work, and could be well-suited to a sector with a wide variety of positions and skills requirements. And the association with a new centre of excellence, and the opportunities that this would offer could boost the standing and attractiveness of existing colleges and courses.

But for it to work, all the colleges involved would need to establish some shared governance arrangements, adopt a common brand and agree joint objectives and course standards. It might make sense for the hub institution to lead on applying for and securing the accreditation for courses on offer, for all institutions taking part in the College of Food.

3. A federation of institutions

A third option would be for colleges to become part of a federation. A possible model is the University of the Arts London, a ‘university with six colleges’ – comprising the Camberwell College of Art, Chelsea College of Art, Central St Martins, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Arts.

The federation of arts colleges has a single board of external governors, who oversee mission and spend, and are supported by a corporate team. Heads of colleges are also members of the executive board.

A federation enables individual colleges to retain their brand, but arguably this is a merger in all but name, as it creates a single leadership team.

Setting up a federation is more justified when there is a degree of complementarity between institutions, for example, they might cover different subject or geographic areas. For example, it might make sense for the Westminster Kingsway School of Hospitality to join forces with the National Bakery School, a private cookery school that is successful at attracting international students, and colleges that serve other areas of London, such as Barking and Dagenham College.

4. Funding the college



1. Estimation of costs

This section provides an indication of costs linked to establishing and running the College of Food, based on existing institutions.

Operating costs

The Education and Skills Funding Agency estimates that a one year, full-time cookery course or apprenticeship costs between £5,000-£9,000 to run (for apprenticeships, full time means 20 per cent of the working week is spent in college and the rest with an employer). The actual running costs might be a little less than this, but not by very much, as any surplus or profits in the further education sector tend to be around one to two per cent.²³

Of course, these are the running costs covered by public funding entitlements and wouldn't cover very much of any recruitment and outreach activities, student or alumni support services, which are key objectives of the College of Food. Costs at private institutions, like Le Cordon Bleu London, are higher. This may be because of greater spend on teaching and equipment, a central location, or because the school's small size prevents it from achieving economies of scale. Staffing is colleges' largest costs – at roughly three quarters of their total expenditure. Some colleges have reduced staffing costs (especially pensions) by operating some of their activities under charity status.

Private and public providers have mentioned in research interviews that the subsidy per learner is low relatively to the costs specific to delivering cooking training – such as space and smaller class size, equipment and ingredients. Apprenticeships funding entitlements also cover an end point assessment that routinely represents 10 per cent of total training costs.

Table 6: Course subsidies or fees

Course	Annual fee or subsidy
Accredited apprenticeship – Commis chef or chef de partie	£8,000-9,000
Accredited apprenticeship - Senior production chef	£4,000
Full time cookery or chef course in an FE college	£5,000 + additional funding if students come from disadvantaged postcodes + high cost programme weighting
Private cookery school course at Le Cordon Bleu	£7,150 (staff cost per student) £24,150 (total expenditure per student)
Degree course at the National Bakery School at LSBU	£9,250 (annual tuition fee)

NOTE: Delivery costs will be different to fees because of cross subsidy between courses, the need to make a profit, and external costs such as examination, plus operating income and donations. That said, we expect the training costs in further colleges to be reasonably close to the government subsidy on which they operate, as colleges make minimal surplus. It is worth noting that around 10 per cent of apprenticeship course fees are spent on the end point examination.

Set up costs

The funding entitlements and fees available to colleges do not cover any set up costs. There are few examples of recent new colleges on which to base estimates. The Ada College for Digital Skills provides a case study. It was a totally new institution and therefore required a large investment in a new building, IT, recruitment, branding and marketing, and fundraising. Colleges are also paid in arrears (their funding entitlements are calculated from the number of learners in previous years), and so new colleges need an advance on future income to start up.

Case study: Set up costs for the Ada College for Digital Skills

The Ada College for Digital Skills is a specialist FE college based in Tottenham. Established in 2016, it is the first FE college created in England since 1993.

The college needed a significant financial donations to get started. In hindsight, one of the founders noted that working as a subsidiary of another college could have provided “80 per cent of the benefits without the pain.”

Set up costs included:

- £40 million capital funding from government and Mayor of London;
- £420,000 ‘start up loan’ from the Education and Skills Funding Agency;
- £800,000 donations from industry partners, charitable trusts and foundations for the period 2017-2019;
- Donations in kind for equipment.

Operational costs are funded by the government and employers via provision for 16-19 years old and the apprenticeships levy.

2. Income

This section explores funding models for the College of Food.

Though some cookery programmes operate without public funding, they either rely on learner fees or charitable donations to do so, and are usually small providers – Le Cordon Bleu being an exception, with over 300 students (although this is small compared to most universities).

For the larger providers such as FE colleges, grants for apprenticeship funding, 16-19 and adult skills provision are the primary sources of revenue. Colleges also attract investment from employers to providing training to their staff, whether in cash or in-kind contributions, for example into kitchen equipment, clothing or ingredients. To be sustainable, the College of Food will need to draw on as many revenue sources as possible.

The College will certainly need additional support with start-up costs for buildings, and to draw up new partnerships between colleges and with employers, to expand the curriculum, broaden school outreach and maintain a network of alumni, who can support the college, through teaching, providing work experience and employment for graduates. Once up and running, the College should be able to sustain its operations through standard government funding, international student fees, charitable donations and corporate sponsorship.

5. Recommendations and plan for action



Whilst there are many ways to reform and strengthen culinary education in London, we believe that few can simultaneously meet London's need for a high status but inclusive organisation in a way that is both cost effective and builds on the city's existing providers. From the options outlined in section two, we recommend the following:

Recommendations

Mission: The College of Food should provide a range of entry-level and advanced courses

We propose that the College should combine basic and advanced course provision. There clearly needs to be a large increase in learner numbers and an increase in specialised and advanced education – and this can only be achieved through offering a wide base of foundation courses, as well as more advanced ones. This model would allow learners to build up their skills over time – potentially over the course of a lifetime – and train for essential skills before returning for more specialised training, as they develop or skills need change.

London's food scene is also highly diverse, and will therefore require cookery courses at both entry and advanced levels. Professional kitchens span from high end to casual dining, and to food trucks, catering and cafes. There are also many other types of preparation jobs which require knowledge of food as well as advanced technical skills, for example in food markets and artisanal food production. Whilst their needs will not be the same as an aspirant chef, some will overlap and it makes sense for these to be considered together.

Status: The College of Food should be a further education institution

In order to minimise set-up time and costs, we recommend that the network be developed within the FE framework. We believe that this is compatible with it developing a central centre of excellence and advanced education – though the college should explore partnerships with higher education institutions when it comes to developing its research and innovation capacity.

Structure: The College of Food should adopt a centre and satellite model of operation

We recommend a centre and satellite or hub and spoke structure. This would ensure that courses are available across London and beyond, so making it easier for local learners to access training, while also providing a centre of excellence offering specialist and advanced training, research and innovation capacity, able to attract international students as well as research and development funding. The centre or hub would in effect be a new institution, with a fresh brand and course offer, but could be sponsored or developed by an existing institution.

For this hub and spoke model to work, the various learning providers who form part of the College of Food should be governed by a board. Because most of the courses and colleges that make up the various parts of the network form part of existing institutions, the board would play a relatively informal coordinating role, though in time some of the course and colleges involved might want to federate and become a single body.

Table 7 summarises our recommended options from the ones detailed above. As already set out, the criteria to select our recommendations were cost implications (both set up and ongoing), and the ability to generate significant status and inclusion, in order to attract talent and increase the diversity of recruits.

Table 7: Summary of recommendations

Aspect	Option	Rationale
Mission	Range of courses	Need to grow the pipeline of talent across subjects and also offer more specialised training for people who are ready for it.
Status	Further education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster set up; • Shorter courses; • Lower ongoing costs.
Structure	Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable high access rates without prohibitive transport time and cost early in training; • Need to build up economies of scale and unifying brand, while ensuring access through foundation courses.

Plan for action

Create a set up group

As a next step, organisations with the potential to deliver radical change to food training in the capital should come together to form a group, with the purpose of setting up the College of Food. The group should include further education colleges and supporters (see below). The group leadership should be diverse in terms of background and business experience – and should include people with the ability to manage capital investment.

Remit

The group of sponsors will need to complete work in three main areas:

- **Curriculum, branding and identity:** detailed work showcasing how a strong brand and course offer can attract learners.
- **Coalition building and course structure:** approaching colleges to map out learner journeys through food, and set out the hub and spoke learning model. This will include agreeing which organisations will award qualifications, and at which stage.
- **Development and fundraising:** interested parties should develop a formal costed case for investment, and work to secure seed investment for the College.

Funding

The work to set up the college will need support, and while existing catering colleges might be able to contribute in-kind support, it will require early investment from the Mayor of London and/or the government, as well as, ideally, funds from trusts, foundations and social investors.

Once the work of the set up organisation is complete, colleges should enter agreements on course delivery and awarding powers. These should allow the College of Food to bid for funding from the Mayor of London and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and from employers' apprenticeship levy monies.

On top of this, the government and/or the Mayor of London should offer a specific funding package that contributes to set up costs and encourages colleges to participate in the College of Food course offer. Indeed, we are clear that in order to attract the best chefs into teaching, and to operate in high quality professional kitchens, the College will need a funding

contribution from both the government and the Mayor of London. The National Colleges have set a precedent for this – though building on existing providers rather than creating a new institution from scratch would save on set up costs.

Longer term considerations

In the long term, the group should consider the potential benefits of moving from this hub and spoke model to a more structured federation of providers. Moving towards a more unified structure is a serious step to take, and colleges should consider whether the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages.

Appendix:

Benefits

We believe the College of Food could help train and educate a new generation of skilled chefs. Although it is not within our remit to quantify the benefits that would result, the table below offers a review of existing studies, which provide a rough estimate of the positive returns that the College of Food could expect to generate.

Benefits expected range from better personal outcomes for students, and greater productivity and competitive advantage for employers, to general savings from public services.

Table of gains

Area	Type of gain	Evidence on estimated value
GDP/ productivity	Wage returns to qualifications	Level 2 qualification offers lifetime earnings benefits ranging from £18,000-£71,000, depending on the qualification obtained. (Quoted from Conlon et al 2011)
		Hospitality workers who hold a Level 2 qualification in hospitality and catering as their highest qualification earn on average between 10% and 15% more than hospitality workers without that same level 2 qualification. For a level 3 qualification, the wage differential ranges from +18% and +25% depending on the type of qualification. (CVER)
Public budgets	Returns of vocational qualifications for public budgets	Obtaining a vocational qualification at any level increases the likelihood of being in employment. Level 3 Qualifications - £21,000-£49,000 Level Apprenticeship - £56,000-£81,000 (Quoted from BIS, 2013)
Societal return on investment	Life satisfaction, inclusion, health, motivation, crime reduction	Learning across the life course is associated with higher wellbeing, sense of purpose and life satisfaction. (Government Office for Science 2017) Social ROI for one year cookery training for young people who are NEET estimated at £3.41/£1 over the five years after completion. (Future Business)

Size of cookery and hospitality schools

	Learner numbers (hospitality only)
Ecole Ferrandi Paris	2,500
Copenhagen Hospitality College	2,000
Westminster Kingsway College	560
Le Cordon Bleu London	350
At Sunrice GlobalChef Academy Singapore	250

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32 - 33 Hatton Garden
London, EC1N 8DL
T: 020 3757 5555
hello@centreforlondon.org
centreforlondon.org
Company Number: 8414909
Charity Number: 1151435

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