

8 practical ways Businesses can help solve the Chef shortage



As any hospitality employer knows, recruiting great chefs is tough. Keeping them is even tougher.

Despite the rise in celebrity chefs and the popularity of TV cookery shows, latest research shows that businesses are finding it harder than ever before to find and retain talent in the kitchen.

There are a myriad of factors contributing to the shortage and, with Brexit on the horizon, the talent pool is set to shrink further. The good news is it's not unsolvable, but businesses need to act fast.

Here are eight practical things you can do, right now, to alleviate the chef shortage:

1. Engage with your local college

Research found that a mismatch between students' expectations and the reality of working in the kitchen means large numbers of young chefs turn their back on the industry. Partnering with your local college can help remedy this.

By offering work experience placements and part-time jobs, or simply supporting the college by acting as a guest speaker or advisor, you can help give students an insight into what it's really like to work for your business – so they're ready to hit the ground running on graduation.

Find your local college in Wales from the map on our skills page

<http://collegeswales.ac.uk/localcontent.php?ContentID=3>

2. Offer an apprenticeship

Research indicates that 80% of UK companies that invest in apprentices report an increase in staff retention, but that's just the beginning – there is also compelling evidence that progressing your brightest and best talent through apprenticeships can significantly boost the bottom line.

If you're new to apprenticeships or would like guidance on how to use them in your business, visit the link on our skills page and complete the Expression of Interest Form

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/apprenticeships>

3. Understand what makes your existing chefs stay

When we talk about a 'chef shortage', it's usually in terms of recruitment, and difficulty filling vacancies. In fact, retention is just as big an issue - labour turnover in the UK for chefs is 40%, compared to the UK average of 15% across all industries.

Knowing what makes your chefs tick is critical to keeping them happy. Talk to your existing staff to find out why they stay with you – and don't be afraid to ask them what they don't like too.

Understanding what motivates them will help you to reinforce those areas and make sure you promote them in your recruitment process, as well as reviewing any problem areas.

You can gather this information through regular engagement surveys <http://people1st.co.uk/performance-talent-management/tailored-solutions/attract-retain/employee-engagement-surveys/> or simply through conversations with staff. You can then develop a plan in conjunction with senior managers to help address any issues.

4. Develop a culture of regular, informal catch-up sessions between chefs and their managers

Staying with the theme of retention, having regular catch-ups is another critical step to support chefs and keep them on board.

Performance reviews are a valuable tool for managers, but the way businesses are using them is changing. There is a clear move away from annual performance reviews towards more frequent, informal conversations to 'take the temperature' of an individual.

This approach can help your chefs feel valued, and will give you more opportunities to address potential issues before they result in a staff member leaving. This works

even better when chefs can see how they are doing against a clear progression and development plan.

5. Support senior chefs with management and leadership training

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

But soft skills are every bit as critical in the kitchen as they are elsewhere. As the saying goes: "People don't leave bad companies, they leave bad managers". No matter how technically competent your senior chefs are, if they're terrible managers, they'll keep losing staff.

Making sure that your senior chefs have the skills to communicate, engage, support, develop and motivate their teams can have a major impact on retention. A number of larger businesses are doing this through apprenticeships or giving chefs access to shorter, targeted courses. Take a look at this Level 4 Diploma in Professional Cuisine which is available in Wales.

<http://www.agored.cymru/Units-and-Qualifications/Qualification/127663>

For more information, contact your local college or fill in the Expression of interest form under Apprenticeships on our skills page.

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/apprenticeships>

6. Create the right culture in the kitchen

It's long been the case that the kitchen has had its own culture, separate from the rest of the business. But treating it as a completely unique entity means that inappropriate behaviour is more likely to go unchecked, increasing the risk of bullying and harassment among staff.

Where toxic cultures develop, they not only drive existing staff away, but also put young people off entering the industry altogether.

Introducing a code of conduct to clearly spell out what is acceptable can help to create the right culture in the kitchen, but, to be truly effective it needs buy-in from kitchen staff themselves.

If you decide to introduce a code, get your chefs and those who interact with the kitchen involved in drawing it up. This will make them reflect on those behaviours and compare them with other workplace settings, as well as making sure they feel ownership over its content.

7. Look at whether rotas can be changed to reduce hours

Chefs are often working 60-70 hours a week, and it's a huge factor driving people out of the industry. It's also one of the most challenging areas to address.

Can your brigades be organised to reduce the number of hours worked? How many chefs are needed for which shifts? Can preparation be done by other teams working different shifts? 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 your 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.

Another thing you can do is look at the flexibility of your contracts to meet different needs. For many businesses this is very different approach from the past.

8. Improve the physical work environment

While a lot of the factors driving the chef shortage are complex, one of the easiest to fix is the physical environment.

Improving the comfort, convenience and aesthetic of the workplace will make it more pleasant and differentiate your business from its competitors.

Examples include 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.

Blog by Martin-Christian Kent, Executive Director, People 1st

For more information go to <http://www.people1st.co.uk/external-blogs/> and search "chef shortage"

For useful information on food waste and sustainability

<https://www.feedtheplanet.worldchefs.org/Sustainability>