

The Food and Drink Manufacturing Sector

As the economy recovers, new jobs will become available. The basic skills required for many of these jobs are expected to rise – it is estimated that by 2010 around 95% of all new jobs will be at Level 2 or above. These fact sheets have been designed to support people in making informed choices about future employment and / or training to make the best of these new opportunities.

The North East Food and Drink Manufacturing Sector

The Food and Drink Manufacturing sector covers the manufacture, production and processing of food and drink. It includes activities such as making new food products (for example, soft drinks or ready meals), quality assurance, and the processing and production of foods from factory to shop floor. It does not include farming (which is part of the Agriculture industry) or the wholesaling and retailing of the finished product.

Job roles across the Food and Drink Manufacturing sector include production managers, quality assurance managers, butchers, bakers, cheese-makers, product developers, food technologists, fishmongers and packers.

The North East Food and Drink manufacturing sector is largely made of Bakeries, but the Meat sub-sector is also important and together they supply many national food stores. A high proportion of businesses within the sector employ less than five people. The region also boasts many large businesses that are household names.

The industry has good levels of staff retention and many workers stay with their employers for a long time. Only 4% of staff in the sector are temporary (agency temping). The sector in the North East has an older than average workforce, so there is demand for new applicants to get involved as current workers retire over the next few years.

The North East Food and Drink sector decreased slightly in size from 2002 to 2009 (starting before the recession), and has seen limited jobs cuts as a result of the recession compared to other UK regions. The recession will not cause this sector to collapse – people still need to eat and drink even if they have less money to spend. Whilst the sector is not recession-proof it is more resilient than other areas of the economy.



The sector is evolving to cater for new demands from consumers, such as the increasing desire for ethical food and organic food. Ethical shopping has increased in popularity in recent years with fair-trade, free-range and locally sourced products being increasingly preferred by shoppers.

Skills required in the Food and Drink sector

The skills required in the Food and Drink sector are often 'hands on' skills (such as food preparation and the ability to operate machinery). Other knowledge-related skills (such as food hygiene and health and safety) are also valuable in this industry, as are management and supervisory skills at higher level occupations.



Employers in the industry look for skills including:

- Basic reading, writing and numeracy
- Team working
- Communication skills (to communicate with suppliers or clients)
- Good attention to detail and concentration
- An appreciation of health and safety and understanding of food hygiene

Most types of qualifications are valued in the Food and Drink sector, from GCSEs to NVQs to Degrees. These include the NVQ in Food Manufacturing, the NVQ in Food Preparation and Cooking, the 14-19 Diploma in Manufacturing and Product Design, and the Foundation Degree in Food Manufacture (and similar subject areas). Safety and hygiene training courses are also highly valued by employers.

There are notable skills gaps in the North East Food and Drink sector, which means that there is demand for new applicants with the following skills:

- Management and supervisory skills
- Specialist food trade skills – especially fishmongers, butchers and cheese makers
- Food scientists and food technologists
- Engineers

Applicants with the ability to manage, communicate clearly and understand the process of developing new products are particularly valuable to businesses in this sector. People who can comfortably interact with multiple retailers and larger organisations such as supermarkets are highly sought after.

Future skills and training provision

Several North East training organisations provide training and qualifications relating to the skills above. There is a plentiful supply of health and safety and hygiene training to ensure that businesses are able to comply with legal requirements. Apprenticeships and NVQs are widely available to study in the region from colleges and employers. These include the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) Awards in Food Safety which are available from Level 1 to Level 4. For those already employed within the sector, the Food and Drink Manufacturing sector also boasts a National Skills Academy (NSA). A NSA supports training providers to present flexible, customised training to meet the needs of businesses.

For more information about the Food and Drink Manufacturing sector please see the following websites:

- Improve – Sector Skills Council for Food and Drink Manufacturing www.improve-skills.co.uk
- North East England Food and Drink www.tastenortheast.co.uk
- The Food and Drink Federation www.fdf.org.uk
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health www.cieh.org