

# Chef / Cook



Connexions Library: C - Catering and Hospitality

## Introduction

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Chefs/cooks oversee the preparation and cooking of food and meals for organisations such as hotels, restaurants, canteens or hospitals. In large restaurants, chefs are organised into teams with different responsibilities.

Also known as:

- Caterer
- Cook

## Work Activities

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Chefs work in all kinds of places, from pubs to cruise liners and from schools to the armed forces. In some places, for example, schools, they may be known as cooks. Their job is to prepare and cook meals.

In some kitchens (for example, in a small pub), the chef might work alone or with the help of only one or two staff. But some kitchens (for example, in major hotels) are huge, and might have dozens of staff, with a number of specialist chefs working under a head chef.

Chefs working in the armed forces, or for companies providing catering for outdoor events, will sometimes work in 'field' or mobile kitchens.

There is so much variety in the catering industry that it is impossible to generalise about a chef's typical working day. For example, some chefs specialise in vegetarian cooking, while others specialise in an ethnic style (such as Thai or Indian). Also, there are different types and levels of chef. In a large kitchen, there may be the following:

- Chef patissier (pastry chef).
- Chef saucier (sauce and main meal chef).
- Chef poissonier (fish chef).
- Chef entremettier (vegetable chef).

What each chef does depends on what kind of chef he or she is. A fish chef will order new stock, inspect it on delivery and prepare it for cooking. Meat and fish chefs need to be prepared to gut and clean animals. Vegetable chefs may have to do hours of scraping and chopping of vegetables.

However, trainee chefs and kitchen assistants tend to do these more mundane tasks. The cooking of a dish may take a few minutes or a few hours, so timing and teamwork are critical.

Chefs also have ranks. There is the commis chef (trainee), the chef de partie (section leader), the sous chef (deputy head/second chef) and the chef de cuisine (head chef). There are also chefs patron - these are chefs who own their own restaurants.

The higher-ranking chefs supervise the lower ones and may have other duties, including things like book-keeping and budgeting, organising training and stock control. Menu planning and recruitment are normally done by the head chef. The chefs at the lower end, especially the trainees, will do a lot of the preparation of food, as well as tasks such as cleaning floors and emptying bins.

In a small kitchen, where there are only one or two chefs, they tend to do all the preparation and cook a range of dishes, right through from starters to sweets. They will also do more of the administration. The same can be true of chefs patron, who'll need good business skills as well as cooking ability.

Whatever kind of place it is, though, it is the menu and the standard of cooking that will make people want to eat there. So chefs need to be aware of current eating trends, food fashions and nutritional information, to put together

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menus that will attract customers. They need to follow strict health and safety and hygiene regulations.

Kitchens are hot, busy and noisy (especially the big ones where lots of people are shouting instructions at once). Head chefs usually demand very high standards of work from their staff.

Chef/cooks usually wear overalls (known as 'whites') which they may have to buy for themselves. They may also have to buy their own set of knives.

## Personal Qualities and Skills

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As a chef/cook, you need:

- To enjoy cooking and cope with the kitchen heat.
- A lot of stamina.
- The ability to stay calm under pressure.
- To be well organised and quick thinking.
- To take a long-term view, as the training can be lengthy; (you'll probably do the more creative aspects of cookery when you've enough experience).
- To work well as part of a team.
- Good communication skills.
- Creativity and imagination to think of new menu ideas and food presentation.

## Pay and Opportunities

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### Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

Salaries for chefs/cooks are in the range of £15,000 - £18,000 a year, rising to around £20,000 - £25,000 a year. Higher earners can make around £30,000 - £35,000 a year, and higher salaries are possible.

### Hours of work

Chefs/cooks work 37-40 hours a week, which may include shift work, split shifts, early starts, late finishes and weekend work. Overtime is usually available. Chef/cooks are often required to work on public holidays. Part-time, temporary and seasonal employment is possible.

### What's happening in this work area?

The overall number of people employed in the food and drink industry is expected to fall by 6% by 2017. However, projections suggest that employment levels will remain high due to the high turnover levels of the industry, and also because over a third of the current work force is due to retire over the next 20 years.

However, demand for chef/cooks is expected to rise steadily over the next few years, as the economy moves out of recession, and public spending on non-essential items increases. Employers are keen to attract committed full-time, permanent staff, and opportunities to progress for these employees are considerable. There is a demand for new workers to replace those who have changed jobs, or left the industry

### Where could I work?

Employers are hotels, restaurants, work and school canteens, hospitals and the armed forces. Holiday camps, cruise ships and other leisure operations, both indoors and outdoors, also employ chefs/cooks.

Opportunities for chefs/cooks occur in catering operations in towns and cities and rural areas throughout the UK.

### Self-employment

Opportunities occur for experienced chefs/cooks to open their own restaurant operation, however this requires considerable financial investment.

## **Where are vacancies advertised?**

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, trade magazines such as Caterer and Hotelkeeper and at Jobcentre Plus.

Vacancies can also be found through specialist recruitment agencies and internet job boards.

Many of the larger catering establishments (hotels, restaurants, etc) have their own website and may advertise vacancies as they arise.

## Entry Routes and Training

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### **Entry routes**

To become a chef, you need to do either a full-time college course, or find a kitchen to take you as a trainee, with day- or block-release to college.

### **Training**

Training for new entrants is usually a mixture of on-the-job training and day-release to college. NVQs in Food Processing and Cooking are available at level 2, and in Professional Cookery at levels 2 and 3.

Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships may be available in your area.

Some colleges offer City & Guilds Diplomas in Professional Cookery.

Initial training usually lasts two to three years. After that, promotion depends on experience and ability.

Specialist qualifications are available for the experienced chef/cook who wants to develop more skills.

Foundation degrees in subjects such as culinary arts are available.

### **Progression**

In larger restaurants, chef/cooks may move into head chef/cook positions. They may also move into lecturing or teaching, training in areas such as nutrition or food technology.

## Qualifications

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There are a large number of relevant courses, so entry requirements vary considerably. Most institutions ask for a good general education. Some GCSEs may be helpful, such as the GCSE in Hospitality and Catering.

A Diploma in Hospitality might be useful for entry to this career.

If you are applying to do a course, you must be able to demonstrate your motivation and commitment to the catering industry. Check prospectuses for more details.

## Adult Opportunities

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### **Age limits**

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

### **Courses**

There is a wide range of college courses in cooking and food preparation that can be taken on a part-time (day or evening) basis, at local colleges of further education.

Colleges will usually consider applications from candidates who don't meet their usual entry requirements. You should check the admissions policy of individual colleges.

## Funding

Candidates can apply to the Savoy Educational Trust for financial support for study of courses related to the hospitality industry.

## Statistics

- 10% of chefs/cooks are self-employed.
- 5% work part-time.
- 3% have flexible hours.
- 3% of employees work on a temporary basis.

## Further Information

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### Professional institutions

Professional institutions have the following roles:

- To support their members.
- To protect the public by keeping standards high in their professions.

For more information on the institution(s) relevant to this career, check out the contacts below.

## Resources

- Careerscope: Hospitality and Leisure. *Springboard*.
- Caterersearch. *Caterer & Housekeeper Magazine*. ([www.caterersearch.com](http://www.caterersearch.com))
- The Caterer. *The Caterer*. ([www.caterer.com/Content/CareerAdvice/Default.html](http://www.caterer.com/Content/CareerAdvice/Default.html))

## Contacts

- Apprenticeships website.  
**Website:** [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)
- Institute of Hospitality, Trinity Court, 34 West Street, Sutton, Surrey SM1 1SH.  
**Telephone:** 0208 6614900  
**Website:** [www.instituteofhospitality.org](http://www.instituteofhospitality.org)
- People 1st.  
**Website:** [www.people1st.co.uk](http://www.people1st.co.uk)
- Restaurant Association.  
**Email:** [bha@bha.org.uk](mailto:bha@bha.org.uk)  
**Website:** [www.bha.org.uk](http://www.bha.org.uk)
- Structure Matters, Head Office, Unit B, Lotherton Business Park, Lotherton Way, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2HP.  
**Telephone:** 08000 891 399  
**Website:** [www.structurematters.co.uk](http://www.structurematters.co.uk)
- Tourism Training Trust, Suite 6, Caernarvon House, 19 Donegall Pass, Belfast BT7 1DQ. (*Irish enquiries*)  
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- UKSP.  
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