

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GOOD CHEFS GONE?

Where have all the good chefs gone?

ARE RESTAURANTS FACING A SKILLS SHORTAGE ON A SCALE NOT SEEN BEFORE?

Beyond the dishes that are gently placed down on tables before them, the average diner is blissfully unaware of the operational nature of a restaurant; anything behind the pass is a bit of a mystical realm. It's not unlike other kinds of businesses though, in that it relies on keeping its team of staff motivated and performing well. Thing is, that's becoming something of a challenge, as there's growing concern of a shortage in the industry when it comes to finding enough skilled staff to supply demand.

Jack Munns is one half of the management team of [Chefshare](#) (along with Phillip Heydon), which is a chef recruitment agency and consultancy based in Devon. He used to be a head chef himself so has firsthand experience of the difficulty in finding the right talent. It seemed to him, Jack tells us, that most of the agencies around "were more concerned with getting a sale than placing the right chef into the right job". As a result of this approach, there was really high turnover of kitchen staff, meaning teams were constantly changing and, needless to say, the quality of the food was suffering as a result.

Sure, that's a familiar story with agency structure in any field, but after talking to some professional catering outfits, it seems that, when it comes to cheffing and hospitality staff, there are other, industry-specific factors adding to these pre-existing issues. A changing culture on using technology within the industry is one of them.

[Professional Academy](#), a business training and apprenticeship provider, says that "stunted growth due to technological changes" could be a factor, with constant development in kitchen technology resulting in the need for chef training and up-skilling. In an industry with long working hours and little time for learning new systems, the problems could be exacerbated, they said, and processes slowed while new systems are put in place. Issues, then, not directly related to skills, but instead to a change in the very way the industry organises and regulates itself.

Those who are embracing technological changes effectively may well be making the most of their skills by then tapping into the gig economy that has swept through other industries. Jo Cranston from Bristol-based [Queen & Whippet Catering](#) believes that it's not a skills shortage we're seeing, but a change in the availability of hospitality professionals.

"In the last couple of years, the best West Country chefs and front of house staff are becoming freelance and are no longer tied to one kitchen or establishment," she says.

“This format is working for Queen & Whippet as a Catering provider as they are able to team up with chefs in each geographical areas and benefit from that flexibility.”

This opinion is echoed by Chefshare founders Jack and Phil, who found a huge demand for their services as self-employed relief chefs.

Interestingly, Jack also believes that there are wage imbalances in junior level roles, with staff “being overworked and underpaid in the lower ranks of the kitchen.” This has led to a lack of chef de parties and commis chefs unable to live on low wages, resulting in individuals trying to skip levels of training and jump a succession of ranks before they are ready. It is this, Jack says, causing gaps in the industry and diluting the skill level...

This article has been created in partnership with Chefshare, who have a mission to improve the chef recruitment process and increase standards in the industry.

What do you think? Experienced any of the issues raised? We want to hear from you about this; send us an email with your comments and we'll keep updating the story.