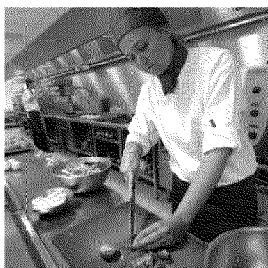


Postgraduate



A student on the University of Brighton's MA in culinary arts

A recipe for success

Gastronomes looking to twin their passion for food with full-scale general management training need look no further than the south coast for what ranks as one of the first in a new breed of specialist postgraduate degrees in eating and drinking based in the UK.

Launched last September, the University of Brighton's one-year MA in culinary arts aims to fill "a major gap" in the market for Masters-level gastronomy study and is aimed at managers, entrepreneurs and chefs, says Peter Odgers, principle lecturer in service management. "Until recently, studying food and drink in depth meant studying abroad – in France or Italy perhaps, even the US – and it has often entailed looking solely at high-end food and wine itself, rather than the management issues involved," he says. "We want to end the myth that all fine food is foreign and develop our own home-grown style of postgraduate training that fully caters for food industry professionals."

The course is targeted towards those already in food or hospitality, as well as those looking to join the industry, and offers three separate pathways. "We offer a professional route for traditional chefs and another for existing managers in hospitality or catering schools who are looking to move upwards," says Odgers. "The third pathway we cater for is the entrepreneurial one; people hoping to open their own deli or specialist restaurant for example."

Specialist modules are tailored towards the background of students; food service systems for professional chefs and innovation in food and drink for the entrepreneurially-minded, for example. With a list of optional modules that includes food media and creative writing, visual culture and semiotics of food, niche food retailing, food service and a four-day gastronomic tourism field trip, Odgers believes that the course has something for every conceivable type of foodie. "It's true that Britain rarely featured on the culinary map until recently, but all that has now changed and we are up there with the rest of Europe when it comes to eating out and experimenting with new types of cuisine," he says.

Not to be outdone, Oxford Brookes University has recently launched what claims to be the UK's first dedicated centre for the study of food, drink and culture via a new venture called Oxford Gastronomica, which aims to improve our relationship with what we eat at a time when food business ethics are high on the political agenda. Backed by some of the most influential names in food and drink, including Raymond Blanc, Prue Leith and Ken Hom, Gastronomica aims to offer a new two-year, distance-learning MA in food, drink and culture from September 2009. Designed for students from both inside and outside the industry, the course will be restricted to 30 at first, but numbers are expected to grow over time. "With issues surrounding food becoming so heavily political, it is important for food and drink professionals to understand and be able to answer the key concerns surrounding contract catering, say, or perhaps food manufacturing practices," says Gastronomica's founder Donald Sloan, also head of department for hospitality, leisure and tourism management at Oxford Brookes.

While Sloan believes that both professionals and consumers "would relish a better understanding of food and drink issues around ethics, sustainability and consumption," he says the course will also provide a new focus for would-be recruits. "Graduates of hospitality and tourism first-degree programmes who need to extend their knowledge of food and

drink issues will be obvious candidates, as will food writers and journalists wanting to examine the role of food and drink in our culture from a business perspective," he says.

The new Masters in fine food and beverage on offer from SDA Bocconi – whose 102-year-old history makes it one of the oldest business schools in the world – is due to begin in January. So far, applications have come largely from chefs, restaurant managers wanting to study the culture and economics of food more closely and would-be entrepreneurs looking to launch new business ideas. Despite the Italian focus, course leaders say the course will be truly international. Although food hailing from Sicily, Tuscany and Trieste will be covered in depth, Scotch whisky will also feature prominently on the course!

Case study

Maltese-born Edward Demarco, 27, is a graduate in hospitality with industry experience in banqueting and hotel room service both in the UK and Malta. He is currently completing his MA in hospitality at the University of Brighton

My dissertation is going to focus on the different cultural attitudes towards food and the different expectations of service in the food industry. In Malta, for example, the service is very friendly and food is usually made from scratch, but you might wait an hour to get your meal, while here in the UK, service is professional and more reliant on technology. Although it appears that serving at tables does not come naturally to British people, most people in the hospitality industry do make an effort to be friendly and courteous. In Asian cultures, people are very sensitive about how they are dealt with; again, this must be taken into account by any food industry or hotel management.

My ultimate ambition is to be the general manager of a really smart hotel, possibly back home in Malta. I love food and I want to make it part of my management career, but I also like the other aspects of hospitality that make up the everyday life of a hotelier.

Virginia Matthews