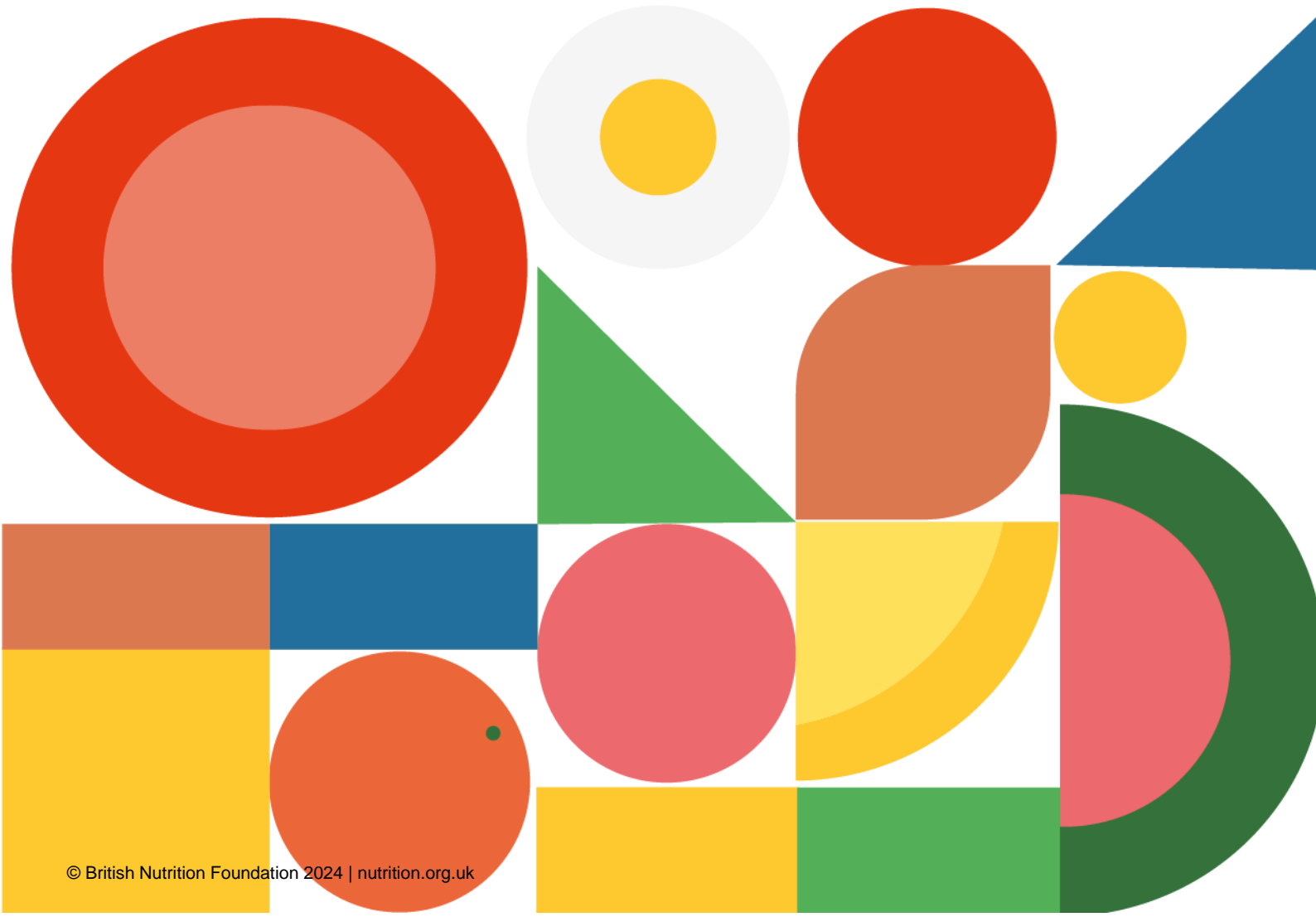




Future A-level (food) roundtable discussion

8 February 2024



Welcome

Background

In February 2024, a roundtable was convened by the British Nutrition Foundation and the Food Teachers Centre, to discuss the current status and possible future of post-16 qualifications related to food education in England.

The intended outcomes of the roundtable were to:

- ascertain a clear picture of the current provision and gaps in Level 3 qualifications provision in England (16-18 years) compared to Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland;
- explore knowledge and skills required for further study and employment in the food sector;
- outline possible content for new A-Level subject criteria and assessment structures, accommodating the breadth of the food sector and qualification/career pathways. Ask for support for a post roundtable working group, who will seek input and draft detailed subject criteria.
- assess the implementation challenges, such promotion of new courses, support and resourcing, including staff capacity. Short term and long term.

A range of organisations and experts were invited to attend the roundtable discussion, including government, awarding organisations, teachers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and industry (see appendix 1). Attendees were sent pre-meeting reading for their information (see appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5). They were also sent the following paper: A-Level Food: The gap that remains: A research project on the impact of removing post 16 A-Level examinations for Home Economics and Food Technology in schools in England in 2016 (2021) <https://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/DATE/article/view/1362>

A range of information was gathered to assist planning for discussion, including:

- 1) Building on the current GCSE Subject Criteria:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-food-preparation-and-nutrition>
- 2) Current or proposed Level 3 courses available in England
 - WJEC L3 Food Science and Nutrition
https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/food-science-and-nutrition-level-3#tab_keydocuments
 - T Level Catering (development suspended)
<https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/students/subjects/catering>
 - Ministerial Update <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-03-09/hcws619>
- 3) Advanced British Standard
 - <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/category/a-level/>

The roundtable

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting, highlighting the purpose of the meeting. Attendees were reminded that the roundtable discussion does not signal that A-Levels for food related study have been agreed. It is important the expectations are managed, as developing new qualifications are not simple or quick. These are decisions that are not for this group, but what we can do is to collectively discuss the current picture, consider what might be appropriate in the future and make recommendations for next steps.

It was noted that we, as the community, are at the start of the journey looking to the future, considering aspects of progression from GCSE through to higher education and career opportunities for our young people. The British Nutrition Foundation and the Food Teachers Centre remain optimistic and passionate to get this right for young people who would love to study and work in the extensive area of food – there is a bright future for them.

Current picture

To ascertain a clear picture of provision across the UK, the current food related qualifications were discussed.

a) Qualifications available in England

Pre-2017, there were two contrasting A-Level qualifications available, Home Economics: Food and Nutrition and D&T Food Technology, plus vocational courses. At this current time, there are very limited routes for students to progress from studying GCSE to post 16 courses. There is one Level-3 qualification available (via WJEC Food Science and Nutrition), although it was noted that this is not accepted by all universities in their entrance requirements. Previously suggested courses from Department for Education (DfE), which were noted in the decision to remove A-Level food, such as 'Patisserie', have not been offered in schools as a replacement for A-Levels as they have been seen as too job specific and not appropriate for a school setting. There has also been discussion about suitability of T-Levels (e.g. Catering) as an ineffective progression route from GCSE, as the study of 'food' is far wider than hospitality. The T-Level development is currently suspended reducing routes further, although it appeared that very few schools had the capacity (curriculum time, expertise, and dedicated resources) required to offer this qualification.

Evidence suggests that schools that previously offered successful A-Levels have not moved over to vocational courses and that these courses do not meet student's needs (Davies, 2021). Overall, this has seen a huge reduction in school centres offering post 16 study in food and numbers achieving qualifications. There is currently therefore a gap in provision after 7 years of not being able to offer A-Levels in food. Teacher feedback shows that without A-Levels to follow on, students see little point on studying 'food' at GCSE as there is no clear progression route.

The lack of A-Level routes appears to have contributed to fewer university admissions on a wide range of food courses, skills gaps in the food industry and low recruitment of food teachers.

There are also some unintended consequences, for example, anecdotal evidence suggests that the removal has had an impact on career progression of teachers, as without A-Level teaching experience staff may not be able to move to middle management posts at their school, limiting their opportunity to progress to senior positions.

However, there has been Level 3 qualifications development (e.g. T-Levels) and the latest announcements of an Advanced British Standard (ABS). It is therefore timely to consider the place of food related courses in any future post-16 qualifications.

The ABS is the most recent government led review of A-Level, with the results of the current consultation to be published in summer 2024. It could be that new food qualifications are included, whether as minor or major. However, this may change post-election time. It was recognised that the food community needed to get Ministerial buy-in to ensure the place of food on a future academic curriculum, and that this could include a food life-skills course for all 16–18-year-old students. It is also timely to create a description of what modern food A-Level courses may look like, as there is an increased need to respond to community and society challenges regarding globally sustainable diets and food production, and cost effective health and well-being of the nation.

Lastly, there was a discussion around the implications of this broken progression route to higher-education and to the food industry in England. Professor Sue Lanham-New (from Surrey University) outlined her concerns from the University of Surrey, which focused on declining numbers of new students. Lauren Woodly, (from Nomad Foods), suggested that since the removal of A-Levels in food some placement students lacked key areas of knowledge and a passion for food.

It was noted that the British Nutrition Foundation has engaged with its Corporate Members for their views on any skill-gap issues. (The responses were written up post roundtable, see Appendix 6.)

b) Qualifications available in Northern Ireland

The GCE Food and Nutrition qualification is available at AS and A2. The course includes: Principles of nutrition, diet, lifestyles, and health; Food security, food safety and quality; and a final research project (which is seen as an excellent way to prepare students for university). Home Economics is compulsory at Key Stage 3, which helps with progression to GCSE and GCE. (See appendix 7.). This course is widely accepted at top universities.

c) Qualifications available in Wales

The Level-3 Food Science and Nutrition qualification is available (it is the second version of the course and is currently being updated). Students can complete a Certificate (AS equivalent) or a Diploma (full GCE equivalent). Units of study include Food safety, Nutritional needs, and Specific groups, experimenting to solve problems, Current issues in Food science and nutrition. It was noted that there is an issue with its 'Level 3' name, rather than 'A-Level'. (See appendix 8.) with uncertainty about reporting in school results, equivalence to A-Levels and acceptability for university entrance.

D) Qualifications available in Scotland

At Higher level there are two qualifications, Health and Food Technology, and Foundation Apprenticeship in Food and Drink Technologies. At Advanced level, there is Health and Food Technology. For pupils aged 14-16 years, there are two options: Health and Food Technology, and Practical cookery. There are clear routes of progression available to students. However, it was noted that there are some challenges, including recruitment of specialised food teachers, cost of food (practical cookery courses) and encouraging parents and young people to consider a career in food. (See appendix 9.)

Workshop

What is needed for the future?

To explore the knowledge and skills required for further study and employment in the food sector, a facilitated workshop session was held. Roundtable attendees were invited to consider the main skills and knowledge required to ensure that employees are successful (at degree level and beyond) and organisations' future needs are met in five key areas: agriculture (food and farming), food production and processing, nutrition and dietetics, retailing and teaching. (Careers such as Events Management, Hospitality and Catering, Professional Cookery are currently covered by Level 3 qualifications and therefore were not included in this discussion.)

Through a facilitated workshop session, a detailed list of key skills and knowledge were suggested (see appendix 10). See table 1 for a summary.

Table 1: A summary of key skills and knowledge

Area	Key skills and knowledge
Retailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Presentation skills and communication ● Business and economics ● Product knowledge and development ● Socioeconomic and environmental awareness ● Regulatory and legal compliance ● Customer service and marketing ● Data analysis and mathematics ● Technology and digital skills ● Teamwork and collaboration ● Global perspective
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooking skills and food science ● Nutrition and dietary knowledge ● Teaching and mentoring skills ● Food safety and hygiene ● Critical analysis and evaluation ● Ethical and societal considerations ● Industry knowledge ● Presentation and communication skills
Nutrition and Dietetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nutritional science and analysis ● Critical thinking and analysis ● Dietary and population needs ● Regulation and public health ● Food preparation and nutrition ● Communication and ICT skills ● Emerging trends and innovations
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding of the food chain ● Environmental sustainability ● Animal welfare standards ● Technological proficiency ● Global perspective ● Food security and availability ● Financial and planning skills ● Communication and promotion ● Soil science and growing technologies ● Continuous professional development ● Seasonality and diversification

Food Production and Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food safety and quality control ● Sustainable production practices ● Microbiology and food chemistry ● Technological proficiency ● Data interpretation and analysis ● Health and safety/hygiene ● Product development and innovation ● Interdisciplinary approach ● Global supply chain management ● Packaging and sustainability ● ICT Skills
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The roundtable attendees reconvened to reflect on the workshop activity.

Key areas included:

- Due to the extensive subject content listed s progression from GCSE, there is a clear need for either course options/modules or multiple A-Level courses.
- Understanding the supply food chain system was emphasised as crucial for students, especially amid concerns about food sustainability.
- Previous focus on ‘product development’ should be widened to include more areas of study
- Balancing breadth and depth in GCSE content was recognised as challenging, with suggestions to transition some elements to A-Levels.
- The importance of rigor in A-Level courses was acknowledged, with an emphasis on ensuring manageability.
- Elements of applied practical work was deemed essential to attract students to the subject.
- Teaching expertise and teacher recruitment emerged as a significant issue needing attention.

Next steps, post event

Attendees were thanked for their time and input to the roundtable.

A post-roundtable survey was circulated to attendees to gather any further reflections about potential post-16 courses in food (see appendix 11 for a summary of their comments). Attendees were also invited to read and consider the ABS consultation, which could include food-related qualification content, as well as pastoral elements.

The British Nutrition Foundation and the Food Teachers Centre pulled together the outputs of the roundtable, comments from BNF Corporate Members and post-meeting reflections into this report. Based on these, a set of recommendations was compiled for the future (see page 6).

The future

This report provides a summary of the roundtable discussions, as well as post-event reflections from attendees and feedback from Higher Education and members of the food industry. It also comprises outline information on potential food courses at Level 3, with comparisons around the UK.

It is envisaged that this report could be used in the future when exploring Level 3 food qualifications, providing a firm basis for development and consensus building.

Roundtable recommendations

1. Don't overlook the importance of including 'food' in post-16 development and discussions. This has a vital contribution in ensuring that the UK economy flourishes (the food sector is one of our biggest) and that we have the necessary skills and expertise to create innovative food production systems and effective health and well-being solutions. These needs should be addressed when considering changes to qualifications, such as ABS and T Levels. Establish a diverse group comprising stakeholders from higher education, industry, NGOs, Awarding Organisations, and teachers to ensure comprehensive representation and support throughout the process. Based on research and feedback, the ideal outcome would be food specific post-16 qualifications.

2. Ensure clear routes of progression and accessibility to 'food' education from Key Stage 3 to post-16. Show clear progression from Key Stage 3 D&T: Cooking and Nutrition to post-16 qualifications, which considers GCSE subject content. This enables pupils to study food, giving them opportunity of access, and offers a clear offer to parents/carers. In addition to post-16 qualifications, the [Core food competences for children and young people](#) (a government produced framework of skills and knowledge which comprise essential building blocks around the themes of diet and health, consumer awareness, cooking and food safety for children and young people) should be updated for 16–18-year-olds, allow all students the chance to learn key food life skills.

3. Develop new food courses that address the gap in post-16 education. There is a consensus that the post-16 gap would be better served with the re-establishment of 'food' A-Level routes or equivalent via the ABS. Establish multiple 'food' courses or incorporate modular units with diverse content to accommodate various interests and career paths within the food sector. Acknowledge the importance of context setting via food courses, enabling students to apply knowledge in a real-world way and helps showcase roles and careers in 'food', thus encouraging progression onto higher education.

4. Strengthen teaching capacity in food education through targeted recruitment and retention efforts for subject-specific teachers. Enhance the subject's status to attract teachers and ensure schools have adequate resources to support the delivery of 'food' courses, including teaching materials, rooms and facilities, and CPD budgets. Post-16 courses may lead to higher use of food rooms, although some non-practical aspects could be timetabled elsewhere in school. Explore the potential for groups of schools/academies to have shared online teaching for different aspects of courses, making more efficient use of teaching staff, for theoretical aspects.

5. Sustain ongoing discussions and collaboration among stakeholders from education, higher education, industry, and NGOs to review post-16 education landscapes and advance food specific subject content development. Maintain dialogue with government bodies to inform policy decisions and support continuous improvement in food education.

Who we are

British Nutrition Foundation

The British Nutrition Foundation is a registered charity. Its vision is simple - healthy, sustainable diets should be accessible to all. To achieve this, the Foundation translates evidence-based nutrition science into accessible and engaging information that people – policy makers, industry leaders, health professionals and the general public – can act upon. In all aspects of its work, the charity aims to communicate clearly, ensuring the information we provide is impartial, relevant and driven by our commitment to public benefit.

The Foundation takes pride in being a great place to work, and in creating information specifically designed to be accessible to all. The principles of equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded across our organisation to help it to deliver its charitable aims and is committed to support initiatives that widen inclusion in nutrition science more broadly.

The British Nutrition Foundation runs and manages the *Food – a fact of life* education programme. *Food - a fact of life* (FFL) is a comprehensive, progressive education programme which is founded on a whole-school approach. The programme communicates up-to-date, evidence-based, consistent and accurate messages around 'food' to all those involved in education. The FFL programme meets the requirements of food and nutrition curricula across the UK. It also aligns with other subjects including design and technology, health and wellbeing, science, numeracy, literacy, geography, religious education, and RSE and health education.

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/>

Food Teachers Centre

The Food Teachers Centre is a UK based self-help group for secondary teachers founded by Louise T Davies in 2013 and supported by experienced volunteer associates. There are over 9,100 active teachers in the group. It provides a platform to exchange best practice, give advice and support to less experienced teachers, answering practical concerns and keeping them abreast of the latest curriculum changes. It is a one-stop shop for like-minded professionals who seek help through authoritative and accurate information. The idea of a 'Teachers Centre' is a response to the lack of local and national specialist support and diminishing Continuing Professional Development with the demise of Local Authority advisers, Advanced Skills Teachers, lead practitioners and supporting organisations.

The Centre utilises new technologies, it is a 'virtual centre' not requiring a physical space in new times, but providing the same high-quality service that traditional teachers centres were recognised for.

The Food Teachers Centre is a place of:

- creative and innovative ideas and action
- practical solutions
- learning and sharing

<https://foodteacherscentre.co.uk>