EUROPEAN LEVEL COMPETENCE AND SKILLS ENTITY – DEFINITION AND STANDARD, BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Interview findings, combined results

Partnership:

CORE – COOKING FOR THE FUTURE

European level competence and skills entity – Definition and standard, Background research

Interview findings, combined results

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INTRODUCTION

The CORE project aims to explore the future dynamics of culinary education across Europe. The project is co-funded by the Erasmus + Programme of the European Union and includes a project team with members from Finland, Estonia, Spain and Ireland. An integral part of the project is to gain insights from senior chefs across Europe and their vision of future skills. A multi-method approach was taken to gather data using both online surveys and in-depth interviews. This paper presents the findings of the CORE in-depth interviews.

CORE explored views of head chefs during in-depth interviews to gain their insights into the current and future trends and requirements which will guide culinary curriculum development. The interviews were semi-structured and recorded. Particular themes were explored during the interview including Cooking Techniques, Environment, Careers, Technology and Social Media while also allowing for general themes to emerge.

A total of twenty-two chefs were interviewed across the four participating countries, all the participants were in a senior role including Restaurant/Chef Owners, Head Chefs in a hotel or restaurant and a Managing Director of a catering company. Following is a summary of their responses.

COOKING TECHNIQUES

Chefs all agreed that basic cooking techniques and knife skills will remain fundamental, with some chefs believing that there is a need to return to traditional cooking techniques, 'the more we go back to basics the more flavour we generate'. Spanish chefs in particular believed that slow food and zero kilometres were important. Another technique which was highlighted was the use of long slow cookery methods at low temperature or sous vide, this renders secondary cuts of meat and poultry suitable for a range of dining offerings. 'Sinful Techniques' and 'Fresh is Best' themes emerged and the marrying of the two being important. While a number of chefs recognised that processes will change due to labour shortages cooking still has to come from the heart.

ENVIRONMENT

All chefs shared a passion for fresh local sourced produce and chefs of the future will need to understand the impact they have on the environment, 'environmental impact will play a huge part in the chefs of the future'. Chefs need to understand how food is

processed and how to minimise waste and using all 'leftovers'. Ordering local ingredients to drive a sustainability and respecting nature were seen as important. Chefs recognised that the consumer wants to know where their food is sourced from and using the best possible fresh ingredients and there was a belief that new laws would be implemented to minimise over-fishing and the use of chemicals on the land. In one location in Ireland a number of restaurants come together and share ingredients to minimise carbon footprint. Having seasonal menus, thinking green and eco-friendly food or wild food was seen as very important with foraging as an example from Finland.

CAREERS

The skill set and career of the future chefs was explored. Findings are in table one. Taking time to develop, observing, learning from everyone and having pride and passion was seen as the basis for a good career. Chefs must find their own vision of what good food is and an exciting future with new technologies along with a work-life balance and healthy work environment shaping careers of the future.

Table 1. Skill set and career prerequisites for chefs

Professional Skills	Knowledge	Interpersonal Skills
− Work independently − Handle pressure − Multi-tasking − Flexible − Creativity and imagination, investigating and passion − Common sense − Work-life balance	− Understand Food chemistry and learn more about ingredients and taking care of the quality of ingredients and seasonality and nutrition − Use more technology − Social Media − Follow food trends	− Customer interactions will increase and customer service and listening to the customer − Social skills and adaptive − Teamwork & multi-cultural/international

TECHNOLOGY

There were differing views on the impact of technology in kitchens of the future. Three particular views emerged, a view that machines can't take over the work of a chef, a view of technology as a threat and a third view of embracing technology 'Classic is fantastic but we do have to move with the times', it's already here, robots are loading

ovens, ovens controlled via app and able to cook and monitor food without opening the oven door.

Technology is always improving and chefs need to understand how to use it throughout kitchen operations from basic IT skills for stock control, ordering, procurement, costing etc. to using programmes to automate operations, using smart fridges and ovens etc. 3D printing was seen as being useful for pastry.

A number of chefs did not see robots taking over kitchen operations in the next 20 years with automation featuring more in Fast Food outlets primarily. The believe that consumers prefer knowing something is made with peoples' hands was evident 'it would never replace the passion and caring and working with your hands, head and heart' and the recognition that 'Fine dining is about the playfulness and creativity of a chef'.

SOCIAL MEDIA

As social media is prevalent throughout society, we wanted chefs to explore how it would impact the chef's job in the future. Social media was seen as very important, 'the image that our business gives to the world'. One commented 'if you want to be successful you need to have an Instagram account and know about marketing online'. Others used it to blog and talk about recipes, get feedback and suggestions, it is perceived as useful for following trends as well as researching recipes.

In particular social media was identified as important for Millennials with 'image heavy and text light' content being important. Food photography was commented as being useful to promote business 'the day of old advertising is long gone'.

SPECIAL DIETS

There were interesting comments on 'special diets' which are certainly impacting menu offerings across all countries. Understanding diets and allergies when designing a menu is crucial. 'Special diets' are becoming popular, and while traditionally it may have been limited to specific allergies (gluten, lactose intolerant etc.), it is now a lifestyle choice including a range of vegan to new protein foods with the nutritional value of food being important to consumers. An increase in the range of allergies has been observed and chefs need to understand ingredients.

As more intolerances are identified, chefs viewed it as very rewarding and saw it as a challenge to find creative options for their customers' requirements, 'it's our job to cater for customers' needs'. Understanding nutrition, making desserts without a lot of sugar, more ingredient-based cooking were some of the ways chefs are responding to special diets and allergens and calories becoming part of the menu.

FOOD TRENDS

Three particular food trends emerged from the interviews, customer's awareness, sustainability of protein foods and life-style choice of customers.

Chefs recognised that food trends can come and be gone again in 3 months and, as people travel more and experience new cuisine, they seek a range of ethnic offerings on menus. Customers are more educated and understand what is good for them, processed foods will be gotten rid of and a return to plant-based products will emerge.

Proteins are getting more expensive so there is a need to find cheaper alternatives with 'insects' becoming a new source of protein. A shift to plant-based eating, agricultural models will change with more nut farmers and seed farmers.

Lifestyle also impacts the future of food trends with fast food/convenience foods and self- service will continue to grow as people too busy to sit down and eat.

THE FUTURE

Basic cooking techniques will remain at the heart of the kitchen, so a lot will remain the same. Food providence, local products as well as local relationships will be important with chefs identifying food culture as important, international dishes with local food. The environment, technology and special diets will remain the greatest challenges in the coming years.

And for the chef themselves, a work-life balance and working as an international multi-cultural team will be the future.

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