# Chapter 6
# Developments in Secondary Food Education in England Since the 1970s: A Personal Perspective


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**Abstract** Food education is engaging and essential for good health and provides the grounding for jobs and careers in one of the UK's largest industries. This chapter explores my experience of food education in English schools and how it has evolved from domestic science in the 1970s through being part of design and technology (D&T) in the national curriculum to more recent trends where the subject has separated from D&T with the introduction of General Certificate of Education (GCSE) Food Preparation and Nutrition for pupils aged 14–16 years. It is a personal tale drawing on my experiences as a pupil, as a graduate in the food industry and as a teacher working in and around London for more than 25 years. Food is intrinsically woven into our culture and our daily lives that we cannot consign it to 'just another school subject' but should elevate its standing in school where we are taught the basics in a way that helps us to understand the world around us and to have healthy relationships with the food we eat. We cannot leave this education to celebrity chefs—they enhance the basic school curriculum, not replace it. A good education in food should be high profile and valued for its contribution to a healthy society and to a well-educated workforce; I wonder if we have achieved this ideal?

**Keywords** Food technology · Design and technology · Food education · Curriculum · Society · Food industry

## Introduction: Purpose and Validity of Food Education

'Magic things happen when you cook…' Asher (1990, p. 7) sums up the exciting subject that I have been learning all my life and teaching for half of it. She goes on to say that 'the combination of one food with another can dramatically alter the

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flavour of them both; sauces thicken, dough rises, sugar caramelises. The first time you experience one of these miracles is very exciting…'

Food education is engaging and essential for good health and provides the grounding for food-related jobs and careers.

Children are taught to make food products: basic skills of chopping and cutting, mixing ingredients and cooking in a variety of ways with outcomes which they can share with friends and family. An interest in food is fashionable, with the rise in celebrity chefs, social media for sharing ideas and TV cooking competitions. Children bring these trends into school, and our curriculum is exciting when it offers the fun depicted in the media. I wonder if we always allow this to happen?

The food choices we make affect our physical and mental health. The many factors affecting this choice can become confusing; we do not always make the best decisions. Public Health England (2017) states that we live in an obesogenic environment where our default choice is for foods which are less than healthy. The statistics for childhood obesity make shocking reading with 28% of children aged 2–15 being overweight or obese and 'younger generations become obese at earlier ages and stay obese for longer'. There are government strategies to combat the rise of obesity, for example, the sugar tax; after all, it is essential that the population is healthy to be economically active and to reduce the strain on the National Health Service (NHS). What we teach in school is an essential part of learning about how to be healthy, not just the explicit curriculum but those aspects of the hidden curriculum covered by the School Food Plan (http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/) and Healthy Schools Initiative (https://www.healthyschools.org.uk/).

An increasing number of our students will work in food-related careers, from nutritionists to sous chefs, food scientists and head chefs, to exploring new ways to source a sustainable supply of food or to market traditional ideas. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017) states that between 1989 and 2015, the number of people who said they eat out more than once a fortnight rose from 10% to 41%. The biggest growth in manufacturing is in the food industry; UK food and drink manufacturing employs 418,000 people with a prediction that 133,000 more jobs will be needed in food manufacturing before 2024 (Tasty Careers, 2019). As teachers, we can introduce students to this interesting and essential industry.

It is not my intention to explore the causes or cures for obesity, nor do I want to spend time promoting food-related careers, but these are issues that form a background to what we teach. The skills of 'making' form the heart of our curriculum and offer children a chance to work together and share food cultures in a more relaxed way than a traditional, classroom environment. These aspects make the subject fun to teach and fun to learn, and we should make use of this as we challenge our students to aim high and make a positive contribution to school statistics.

This chapter explores my experience of food education in English schools and how it has evolved from domestic science in the 1970s through being part of design and technology (D&T) in the National Curriculum (NC) to more recent trends where the subject has separated from D&T with the introduction of GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition (FP&N). It is a personal tale drawing on my experiences as a pupil, as a graduate in the food industry and as a teacher working in and around London for more than 25 years.

## My Own Schooling in the 1970s

When I was at secondary school in the 1970s my home economics lessons followed a familiar and safe format; we watched the teacher make something, we took notes and made it the next lesson. We were taught nutrition, food safety and about types of ingredients.

I learnt so much from these lessons, systematically going through the traditional English types of recipe, all the pastries, all the cakes, types of sauce and how to use them, not a chilli or a clove of garlic in sight. By the time I was doing advanced (A) Level (16–18 years), there was a great food science section; how do we know what happens in foods if we don't learn about the science behind it? Exactly those miracles that Asher (1990) refers to. We didn't need to be taught about seasonal foods and about the source of foods; our families were still growing vegetables in the 1970s, and it wasn't possible to buy foods out of season. Strawberries at Christmas? Of course not, they are a summer fruit.

We were mostly white children for whom the messages at school mirrored what we were taught at home. I grew up in suburban Surrey, and my classmates ranged from those on limited family budgets to those whose parents worked in the city and for whom it would be normal to have dinner parties at the weekend. It was perhaps the heyday of comprehensive education; we all went to our local school so a great social and academic mix. Ordinary (0) Level examinations for 14–16 years olds were well established, and the NC and GCSEs were not even on the horizon, an easy time to be teaching for many reasons; my school was at least an easy place socially to teach.

Alongside A Level domestic science, I also studied biology and chemistry, so I guess it was inevitable that I would take a food science degree. I didn't know anybody who worked in the food industry, but I was aware of research jobs, not least because of the testing laboratories in our town, packaging as well as food research but no food manufacturing. I happened upon the food science degree leafing through the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) handbook. And I am very glad that I did. The 1980s was a time of great change in England, especially for the way we source our food for the day. I was in the sixth form (16–18 years) when the first McDonalds opened locally; it was rare for people to eat out, and my family's experience of that would be eating fish and chips on a trip to the seaside.

Was this curriculum fit for purpose, i.e. engaging, promoting a healthy relationship with food and pointing the way to progression for the future? Probably, it taught me about food, how to make good choices and how to be safe. And in no way did it challenge what I was brought up to believe within my family. I neglected to mention that if I had been a boy then I would not have studied food; I would have been in the workshops making things from metal and wood. My secondary education in food was about being able to provide food for my family when I became an adult but also so much more than that. It opened a world beyond school that combined my interests with career options.

## My Experience of University and the Food Industry

Both the content and style of teaching at university were quite different to anything I had experienced before. As a science subject, we had lectures and tutorials, lab work, independent research and the most specialist aspect, working in small-scale manufacturing to make cheese, heat treat milk and freeze-dry orange juice. I was totally fascinated by it; it was fun and certainly gave me a foundation for a career in the food industry. There was no development of the life skills aspect of school home economics, but I didn't expect this for my degree course. Not many of my contemporaries had studied A Level domestic science, and I think that initially they were disadvantaged. Part of my course was to spend time in food production, and I worked at Loseley Dairy for 3 months making ice cream, yoghurts, cottage cheese and frozen desserts as well as processing milk. We had visits to food factories, for example, Haverhill Meat Products, where the live pigs enter at one point and are processed to joints of meat and meat pies; United Biscuits, Mars and a canning company, to see the process for baked beans, all of which helped us to apply the theory of manufacturing to real life and of course deepen my understanding for the new subject of D&T when I became a teacher.

After graduating, I worked for Trebor, the sweet company, as a product development technologist, working on long-term projects where a gap in the market was identified through market research, for example, aerated products, to meet the need for lighter sweets and to sell air—way more profitable! And short-term projects to develop and improve existing products; improvements to the Maynards' wine gum flavours, trying to make the texture of tropical pastilles like a competitor's version. I worked with a Dutch company to explore products that could be bought for a wrapped pick 'n' mix line and carried out trials on a new pilot-scale jelly cooker for the refurbished research and development (R&D) lab. The reason for talking about this is the link to my teaching. Never, during my degree and in all the time I worked for Trebor, did anyone refer to the design process although we were using it. We worked in teams with people from market research and marketing, research and development (R&D) and quality control and with factory staff. We tried and tested everything we did, so it was essential to have good communication and to understand how parts of the work linked. Feedback from market research was used to change the recipes; we would do factory trials, often at 6 am before they started for the day, and get feedback from the people on the production line about how the ideas might work in practice. This constant checking and modifying was one of the most important aspects of the work which I bring out to my pupils. My understanding of industrial practice is very good because it was my day-to-day practice and we were, of course, using an iterative design process.

In terms of developing my understanding of food, and aspects of this to take into teaching, the predominant learning for me was how to make food products on a large scale, about how teams of specialists work together over a period of years to understand the science of a product, how it appeals to customers and how to formulate the recipe so that it will last for a long time and make a profit. After a few

years, I wanted more; my friends had taken time out to travel, and I was getting bored of using the same process to explore new ideas. I was taught to deliver training at Trebor and found that I was good at it, so I applied for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to become a teacher, mostly because I wanted to feel secure when I was travelling that I had something to return to. Never did I think that I would make teaching my almost lifelong career. And one of the reasons for this is the change that had happened since I left school. Everything was now about food technology with its link to industry and to catering. I was clearly well qualified and experienced to teach this 'new' subject and was something of a rarity at the beginning of the National Curriculum years.

## My First Year of Teaching and the National Curriculum

My first year of teaching in 1990 was at Kidbrooke School in Greenwich, the first purpose built comprehensive school in London, originally for girls and described in the 1950s as having "the domestic science section, which had all of the model appliances the girls would encounter when they ran their own homes…fully-furnished mock 'flats' in which the girls could practice their homemaking skills" (Cornelius, 2015). I suspect that in 1954 when the school opened this was very advanced and impressive to the parents who would send their girls there. So perhaps the same thinking was evident 40 years later when the school had chosen to be part of a Key Stage 3 Pilot for pupils aged 11–16 years for the new subject of technology.

The focus on industry was great; I had a degree in food science with a focus on the food industry, and I had worked for a food manufacturing company and was excited about the updating of a subject that was my passion. This is where I was learning to be a teacher, not an easy place to work for many reasons and no long-established plans and resources to work from. I had no idea what I was teaching. The assessment was so process based, with no clear content to either teach or assess, and I was lost! I really cannot say with any certainty that the students I taught that year had any fun, nor did they learn life skills and no explicit teaching about catering or manufacturing. In fact, my lessons did not have much that we would be recognised as food teachers, but nonetheless I embraced it and became part of the technology faculty trying to match the term 'structures' to the food curriculum by doing things which now seem crazy such as pie cases and how they support the filling inside.

I don't think that it was hard for me because I was a new teacher; I think it was hard for everyone. Did they have training to support this change? Not really. Did they like the change? I'm not sure but they were trying hard to do the right things, to be professional in their work and to follow the government direction. There were massive school-wide changes, added to which teaching a shared program of study for a diverse set of subjects was a difficult idea. Technology in the National Curriculum (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1990) provided us with a programme to follow, to plan our lessons from and to use for assessment of

students' progress. I look back at it now through the eyes of an experienced teacher and am stuck—what should I teach? There is no mention of specific content which is all based around a 'design process' which could be taught and assessed through the medium of any of the subjects, this being a deliberate decision to view the subject holistically. The idea was for pupils to find the knowledge as they needed it. Over time teachers planned specific content into schemes of work which was even supported by a publication from the Design and Technology Association (2013) to show progression, but initially the focus was on process.

## Who Unified the Message for a Diverse Group of Subjects?

The national curriculum for technology (DES, 1990) was a very broad subject that brought together differing disciplines of art and design, craft design and technology (CDT), home economics, business studies and information technology (IT), designed to provide a unified approach to subject content and based on the process used for designing and making rather than traditional content about materials being used.

Kimbell and Stables (2001, p. 179) describe the deliberate exclusion of content to be taught in a positive way saying that 'we emphasise the need for students to acquire and create new, task-related knowledge'. Their vision was that students would be working on design tasks and research knowledge as they needed it. This is sound thinking at sixth form (16–18 years) and degree level, and in the same way that co-construction educationalists will support students discovering for themselves and together, it comes from people who were taught knowledge and taught to memorise it so that it was to hand when needed. For me, I don't think that it works at secondary level.

From the advent of the NC in 1990 (DES, 1990) to the reform of GCSE examinations (DfE, 2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-gcse-reform, the community of D&T teachers worked hard to understand and establish this new subject and maintain its position in the school curriculum. The coming together of what, on paper, appeared to be a wide range of diverse subjects was dominated by craft design and technology (CDT) and home economics; with subject associations Design and Technology Association (DATA) and National Association of Teachers of Home Economics (NATHE) respectively; both aiming to develop the subjects through supporting a community of teachers with research and sharing good practice to raise standards.

NATHE joined with the Design and Technology Association, the professional association for teachers of design and technology, including food, textiles and product design, in 2000, to form a professional body to represent those involved in food education (The National Association of Teachers of Home Economic and Technology Sheffield and District Branch, n.d.). This gave a central focus for subject development and sent a strong message to teachers about working together. I have always thought that to have one, central teachers' association for our subject is a strong

point; in fact even the National Association of Advisers and Inspectors of Design and Technology (NAAIDT) became part of DATA in 2013 (NAAIDT, 2013). DATA became the Design and Technology Association and promoted the view that D&T was at the centre of the curriculum and could teach students aspects of many other subjects, to be collaborative problem-solvers and to be ready to face the ever-changing world in the twenty-first century. What was missing? An understanding about what was happening in classrooms at that time. Teachers needed to have more concrete aims, were surrounded by equipment to make things, had experience of teaching craft skills and were faced with children eager to take something home. There was no clarity about the unique selling point (USP); that in our subject we make things.

The history of the development of D&T has been well documented, so I am going to pick out some of the key issues for food education rather than provide yet another factual account of what happened between the advent of the NC and the revision of the GCSE examinations and how they affected me as a teacher and the children I taught.

## Did Food Flourish Within D&T or Was There Just Too Much to Teach?

Society and culture have been major drivers for change in the D&T curriculum, especially food technology, so how did we ensure that it flourished within the overall D&T curriculum and become a valued part of it?

There are many reasons for including food in the D&T curriculum; it's popular, cheap (after the initial start-up costs), quick to make a complete product and even quicker to make and test parts of products. It's fun to teach and fun to learn, results are usually eaten and very quickly forgotten but real lessons are learned, it offers great opportunities for collaborative working and sharing of results and it's easy to do mass production activities.

As a food teacher who had a background in the food industry and was brought up to believe that girls should do more than become housewives, I was excited by a curriculum that meant I could focus on food produced in catering outlets, factories and the home. The government invests a lot in understanding the nations' diet, and the recurring message is that obesity and related conditions are rising, so an important part of developing our food curriculum is to look at all situations in which we eat and teach the most important message of balance.

We become experts in food from an early age in a way that we don't with the other materials; we are emotionally and physically involved with food. Pupils' experience varies from one boy in my Year 10 (aged 14 years) class who takes turns at cooking the family meal to those who are not allowed into the kitchen. These pupils are often scared to turn on the ovens, have little manual dexterity and are quite inflexible about certain things such as weighing to the exact gram or cooking

for the exact time stated in the recipe without having a feel for the product they are making.

I enjoy planning the variety of food technology projects, focusing on being creative, as a celebrity chef idea in one project and the strict factory production in the next. It could be exploring how cultures and traditions affect the food we eat or the need to observe healthy eating guidelines. The other unique aspect is that the ingredients used change completely during making, and it is in this aspect that I would promote more than any other. Pupils need to use ingredients and try things out in different proportions and with different processes to see the effects of the changes they are making. It's when they do this that they are really designing with food and get to appreciate the miracles that happen, and of course we teach them to understand the science behind it.

During this time (from 1989 to mid-2000s), I don't believe there was a strong central understanding of what outstanding food technology looked like at Key Stage 3 (11–14 years) and the variety of GCSEs available from D&T: food technology to home economics and catering created diversity at Key Stage 4 (14–16 years). There was too much to teach with some teachers focusing on good food education and others on good D&T, but it was, I think, impossible to do both. My focus was on food as part of D&T, and as a head of department, I worked hard to promote all materials. I suspect that Richard Kimbell and the Design and Technology Association would say that this diversity is a strength of D&T, but we are working in an environment where an element of control and rigour are needed; how much will the unit cost? What materials do we need to order? What are the learning objectives for the lessons? How will we assess the work and measure progress?

## Rotation Courses Play to Teachers' Strengths, But Do They Hamper Pupil Progression?

A rotation system is often used to manage the variety of subjects where students study a different material each half term, taught by the specialist teacher. Davies and Steeg (2005) discuss the concerns about this rotation system and the negative effects on the quality of teaching and learning. The design process ties the subject together, but my frustration was with teachers who would expect students to know how to research or how to draw ideas or how to carry out an evaluation and not understand the need to explicitly teach them how to do it. My own experience is that such a system narrows the curriculum, rotational courses were designed to be easy for the teacher but spelled disaster for progression of the students, teachers do not invest time in building relationships with their students and they do not invest time in understanding the bigger picture of D&T or the wider team of teachers.

One school where I worked planned the explicit teaching of process statements which became more challenging over the year rather than being attached to the material area. I loved teaching at that time; I was full of energy, enthusiasm and ambition. We had fun working as a team at this school, and we had support from the

local authority subject advisor in the form of Richard Green who went on to become chief education officer (CEO) of DATA and links to business enterprise advisors. One of the reasons that this chapter is told from such a personal viewpoint is that, far from being a national experience, D&T developed into a subject that depended on people's own personal view of what to teach and how.

The rotation system leads to a lack of rigour and challenge; students want to do well and to achieve the highest grades and something vital was lost in our subject as GCSE entries declined. And how did this decline affect food education and food teachers? Many carried on teaching what they had always taught, many like me tried hard to work food into the D&T curriculum and then there were the new teachers, who are employed to teach D&T with little or no training in food and therefore fell back on packaging and graphics at the expense of working with food as a material, or they were former caterers who taught sound food education, especially making but little, if any, of the design process. Clearly this situation could not continue.

## The Impact of the Document Food Technology in Secondary Schools Report (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 2006)

This document was a review carried out because of concerns about food technology and whether it was contributing to pupils' understanding of healthy eating. Anecdotal evidence pointed to issues around the content of lessons being too focused on D&T written work and not enough on teaching children how to cook. Teachers found it hard to teach food both as a life skill of cooking and as a material with which to design; if we were trying to do both, there simply was not enough time in the curriculum. It pointed to great variation between schools and concluded that one of the most important things was the need to clarify the nature of food technology as a subject.

I have been a firm advocate for food being part of D&T; after all, the food industry and chefs follow the design process, and my own qualifications and experience fit well with being a D&T teacher. Ofsted (2006, p. 6) was pretty damning, at one point quoting how family's and teacher's values for the subject clashed, with the comment from one Year 9 girl 'I know what my dad will say: "I'm not eating that rubbish, give it to the dog"'. It probably sparked the beginning of the separation of food and D&T. It managed to find the worst examples of food being taught by non-food specialists with too much emphasis on things like drawing food ideas, even using computer-aided design (CAD) packages, playing to the strengths of the teacher and not to the needs of the students or to the teaching of sound food-related content or skills.

One outcome was the 'Licence to Cook' initiative (Food a Fact of Life (n.d.) https://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/11-14-years/cooking/licence-to-cook/ which ran from 2007 to 2011 and was viewed by many as permission to move away from D&T and focus purely on life skills and cooking. Its aim was to provide 16 hours of practical cooking experience to all secondary pupils but not necessarily as part of

the D&T curriculum. Also, at that time, the National Strategies (DfE, 2011) were playing a big part in how schools were changing.

I worked as a consultant for the local authority of Bromley from 2002 to 2011 supporting teachers to use the National Strategy materials. This work took me away from teaching, but I was involved in writing and promoting the framework of objectives for D&T (DfES, 2004). This was process based and still did not address the need to clarify content for each material area; teaching of *design* was not as good as that of *making*, so the objectives and support focused on the explicit teaching of design, thus addressing one of my own frustrations. Whilst this work was essential for D&T, it did nothing to address the ongoing issues of food education, but curriculum reforms were on the horizon.

In 2011, I returned to teaching as a subject leader for D&T at an inner London comprehensive. In the years I had been away from the classroom, things moved on; food and textiles and workshop-based D&T were more separate than ever with most teachers holding firmly to their own specialisms. The teaching of design skills had become more explicit, and we had a shared language for how to teach these. The D&T Association was still arguing that D&T is at the centre of the curriculum with transferrable, process-based skills, but I believe this thinking was redundant; it is not *what* is being taught but *how* that teaches students those skills. Ofsted, and therefore senior leaders, focused on lesson planning, on clear aims for lessons and how we were giving feedback to students against those aims, on clear and measurable outcomes and of course on how students were being engaged and how they were making progress. A geography teacher teaches collaboration and analysis during field work, a drama teacher will teach evaluation skills in relation to performance and an English teacher develops pupils' creativity. But other subjects recognise that this is not the subject but the vehicle for learning and an excellent by-product in terms of outcome. Spielman (2018) picked up this point when she recognised the opportunities for cross-curricular work, but we still need 'clarity about what your D&T curriculum really encompasses'.

The most recent revision for the D&T national curriculum for pupils aged 5–14 years (DfE, 2013) includes a cooking and nutrition section, within D&T. Food should still be taught as a D&T material, but the amount to be taught is large, so we focus on cooking and nutrition—relishing the clarity and having clear pointers to build progression across the key stage. Typically, food lessons will be given a third of D&T curriculum time in each of the KS3 years so not much with which to build a body of knowledge and skills. I constantly remind myself that there is not enough time to do everything listed in the programme of study (PoS) or to pick up every initiative and exciting idea, but we decide what to teach and do it very well. After all, the pupils use the experiences from 11 to 14 years to make decisions about choices at 14–16 years, and where we were once popular, the falling numbers and poor performance in examinations would seem to suggest that the subject was losing its place. Statistics from Joint Council for Qualifications (2019) https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses show a fall in entries for D&T (all specifications) from over 370,000 in 2006 to fewer than 166,000 in 2017. Now that food is a separate GCSE, our figures are positive; just less than 50,000 pupils took the new

GCSE in both 2018 and 2019. The reformed D&T seems to have fared less well with a drop to just over 127,000 in 2018 and less than 100,000 entries for 2019. My experience is that students want to do well, and they recognise the importance of their results in gaining entry to work and to further qualifications; it is not enough for a subject to be fun; as teachers, we must know what our subject is and challenge students to achieve the highest grades.

In 2016, we started to teach the reformed GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition which I love even though all reference to D&T has been removed. The specification includes aspects of food science, nutrition, food provenance as well as high level cooking skills. Students are assessed on their ability to plan, carry out and analyse the results of a science-based food investigation. There is a theory paper which tests pupils recall, their ability to interpret information and to evaluate issues from various points of view. The third assessment is, for me, still a D&T style activity where pupils make three dishes in 3 h. The investigations do have a link to 'making' as the final part is an evaluation where the students need to discuss how they would make use of their findings in cooking specific dishes. They are tested on their ability to plan, to modify existing recipes or to be creative with their own ideas as well as evaluating the results. In the foreword of Fehners (2016), Heston Blumenthal refers to people who can cook as 'magicians' and how the kitchen is like an alchemist's lab. This understanding of the science behind the cooking allows us to challenge our students. Coe (2013) states that 'learning happens when people have to think hard'. I have been inspired by many people in my life and am motivated to keep learning and to challenge students in my subject to 'think hard'. I will never be satisfied that the purpose of my curriculum is just about cooking as a 'life skill'. The new GCSE has renewed my optimism that we can teach students strong core aspects of food education in a way that challenges their thinking as well as their physical skills and that we can compete with all subjects to increase our entries and our results.

So where are we now? Have we come full circle to a point where I am teaching what I originally signed up to? I think that the idea of modernising the traditional craft subjects under the same banner was a sound idea, but I do not think that this has worked out in practice. Spielman (2018) emphasises this point when she refers to food, design and textiles and how there is 'not a great deal of point trying to make this into a seamless whole'—we need to be sure what the D&T curriculum is about. We have not regressed but been involved in a 30-year iterative design project to determine what this new subject should look like, and regrettably it is no longer one subject.

## Where Are We Now and Where Do We Want to Be?

The networks we make are such a vital part of our role; I have benefitted from and contributed to DATA projects and local networks as a teacher and continue to be challenged and inspired by other teachers. I wonder what the future holds for central

support for our subject. Hardy (2015) in her discussion about the reasons for the drop in GCSE entries describes the new GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition as being 'taught as a life skill' and compares this to the new GCSE D&T which 'will also be an essential qualification for careers and work-related skills, not just life skills'. The keywords here are life skill versus essential qualification. She seems to be undervaluing the food GCSE. And what of central support for food teachers which appears to have been removed from DATAs remit? The only national support I can find now is the Food Teachers' Centre (2019), a self-help group formed in 2013, but I am not a fan of social media, so I do not access or contribute to their closed Facebook group. I receive regular email updates and am shocked by their 'Tunnocks Tea Cake Challenge' https://foodteacherscentre.co.uk/tunnocks-teacake-challenge/ which is an inauthentic idea to teach food styling. We would never serve that product on a plate and decorate it; it is very high in saturated fat and sugar providing, in just one biscuit, 13 and 10%, respectively, of our recommended daily intakes (RDIs) (Thomas Tunnock Ltd 2018). On the other hand, the FTC promotes the 'Love Food Love Science' website https://www.ifst.org/lovefoodlovescience which, provided by the Institute of Food Science and Technology, has great resources for the food investigation aspects of the new GCSE. We are in, yet another, time of change, and as a community of teachers, we must continue to challenge ourselves and our students to be the best, with a clear understanding about what this means.

Parents' expectations for subjects have a strong influence on their children. Parents love to talk about the subject as cooking or home economics and remember what they did at school either fondly or with horror. During last October's open evenings, I had many parents asking, for the first time, if food was an integral part of the curriculum or an after-school club. It appears that many local schools offer after-school clubs, and a quick look at their websites shows that it is rare, in that part of West London, for schools to offer a GCSE Food course. Parents were delighted that it was an important part of that school's curriculum. The students love cooking, and they see their families cooking at home, few of which used ready-made meals. Several family members work in or own restaurants, and they value the contribution that my lessons made to this overall picture of their food education.

Being a teacher of food is sometimes a difficult job; everyone's an expert, and in a mixed population of students, it would make perfect sense to some that we teach about locally produced organic foods; for others, the prohibitive cost of this would make the lesson seem crazy and far removed from their own lives. Teaching about dietary guidelines is hard when parents are telling their children that low-carb diets are important and that we need sugar to give us energy, but has it always been this hard? The students' families will have ways to do things, and they read and watch so much about food in the media that it is hard to break down the misconceptions. One key aspect of this for me is washing chicken—the students in my current class are scandalised that we don't wash chicken. They go to great lengths to tell me how to do it in vinegar or lemon juice in a bowl under a running tap and why it is so important. I counter their arguments with the National Health Service website (NHS, 2017) which explains why it is potentially dangerous whilst at the same time meeting them part way to say that my mum would rinse the inside of a whole

chicken. We have reached a compromise: they can wash the chicken and hold onto their belief that it is the right thing to do so long as they do not write about it in an examination paper and, of course, use copious quantities of antibacterial spray at the end of the lesson!

Where does this education lead to? People talk a lot about the importance of cooking as a life skill, but I think this undervalues what we do. Learning about food in school introduces children to the great range of careers in the food industry; if they live in a rural setting, then they would know about farming; if they live in the midlands or the north of England, they may know people who work for Allied Bakeries or Fox's Biscuits and will know about factory jobs. I teach in London where students know about catering but are not familiar with higher-level jobs for which you need a degree. The new GCSE gives a great introduction to all aspects of the food industry, and progression is clear through vocational courses into catering from Post 16. It is a shame that students' access to food-related degrees in higher education in England is only through science A Levels because of the deletion of A Level in food technology (DfE, 2015), and so we need to work together with science and career departments in schools as well as parents to acknowledge the importance of food-related careers.

There are several pressures on teachers, and I think that for a food teacher, there are some subject-specific pressures which I like to challenge. The views of other staff and parents are not always complimentary with them directing students to choose English baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, believing that a GCSE in food is about making and for lower-ability students and for those who want to enter the catering profession. They are often disdainful when asked to taste students' food, they make comments about how those with behaviour issues would be good at it, or that it would be good for them. I am re-energised by the new GCSE and confident that the subject can hold its head up higher.

## And Finally

Society changed over my lifetime, but food education stands the test of time and the buffeting of these changes. To teach children how food is grown and how it is processed and cooked and the nutritional aspects of how it affects our bodies is a key element in a good education system. Why do we need to learn this information? Because it's about understanding concepts that are integral to our well-being, because we need to promote healthy lifestyles in childhood so that the future adult population is less prone to disease and illness, because the world's population is increasing and we need to provide for that with healthy and readily available food which is produced efficiently but showing good welfare for all involved and because we need to be safe when preparing food for ourselves. We need to allow for evolution in our world and draw on our basic knowledge as well as our creativity to use new resources sustainably. Influences are all around us and the modern-day teacher is one tiny aspect that children will take notice of. According to

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2016), the so-called millennials are changing their eating habits because they are influenced by social media: bloggers and apps. We cannot leave this education to celebrity chefs and the media—they enhance the basic school curriculum, not replace it.

A good education in food should be high profile and valued for its contribution to a healthy society and to a well-educated workforce; it should hold its head high in the school league tables with students of all abilities being proud that they take our exams, and as teachers we should be proud of the contribution we make with a subject that is fun to teach. I wonder if we have achieved this ideal?

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