

A graduate's honest reflection on beginning a career in the Scottish food and drink sector

Calum Brown, Commercial Development Co-ordinator for Brakes Scotland

I was honoured (and slightly overwhelmed!) to be included in the esteemed line of speakers at The Knowledge Bank's Focus on Foodservice conference in March. Here is a snippet of my reflection on being a graduate in the Scottish food and drink industry and what the sector needs to do to recruit more graduates. To view my full speech, including my take on the foodservice sector, please visit foodanddrink.scot/the-knowledge-bank.

Coming out of university last year, I began applying for jobs. Banks, accountancy firms and lots of other organisations as well as spotting a graduate role with Scotland Food & Drink. I had always been interested in food and drink (mainly eating and drinking) but had never considered the food and drink industry as a career until now and in hindsight, if you're interested in something then chances are you will put more into it.

My role is working at Brake's Scotland as part of the local buying team and since starting I have had the chance to see the business from all angles—I worked nightshifts in the warehouse and even joined a driver on a delivery day. I am now much more aware of the breadth of opportunities available across the sector which is exciting when considering the opportunities available for my career. In the past 6-7 months, I've had the chance to meet interesting people, sample excellent produce, and even speak to a room of people at a conference. For a young person starting their career that kind of variety of experience is invaluable.

So why don't young people consider the food and drink industry as a career path? I believe it is mostly due to a lack of knowledge about the opportunities available.

Working in food and drink is often generational (which isn't a bad thing) or people enter the industry by chance. We need to do more, as a sector, to promote the fantastic opportunities available.

The food and drink industry is undoubtedly growing, benefiting from widening consumer interests and choices and a lot of this is driven by

innovation. People will always need to eat, providing security to the industry's growth.

There are opportunities along the chain including agriculture, manufacturing, product development, and distribution. There is a demand for individuals with an interest in food and drink at all levels of the industry, many of which require no specific experience just a passion for quality products and an enthusiasm to learn.

In the UK, over 20% of the top one hundred companies are in food manufacturing, providing a broad spectrum of opportunities with SMEs making up over 96% of businesses in the food and drink sector. The FDF estimates that the sector will need 140,000 new recruits by 2024 so doors are opening for people at a rapid rate.

For me, it is the scale and effort behind the scenes that goes into the food and drink industry that is so impressive; it is a truly 24/7, 365 days a year operation. Particularly in Scotland, we are extremely lucky to have more than our fair share of amazing producers making excellent things.

My main takeaway (pun intended!) from my first 6 months in the Scottish food and drink industry is the shared passion everyone I have encountered holds for the industry. It is contagious and a wonderful environment to work, develop and thrive in.

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