



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## Skills: Resource sheet for Food and Drink SMEs

Food and drink manufacturing is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, and so has a huge role to play in generating good jobs all across the UK. With many SMEs continuing to experience challenges in recruiting and upskilling staff we know that this can also have an impact when you are looking to grow your business. Below is a summary of some of the key Government-led sources of support for skills and recruitment:

### (1) Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are for those aged 16 or over and combine working with studying to gain skills and knowledge in a job role. Businesses can choose a course from the Apprenticeship Standards which matches their needs. Apprentices can be new or current employees, of any age.

How long does it take?: A minimum of 12 months. Employers need to provide 20% 'off-the-job' training delivered by a training provider during your apprentice's normal working hours.

What will it cost?: You may have to contribute 5% of the apprentice's training and assessment costs – depending on the size of your business and the age of your apprentice. You will also need to pay the apprentice the apprentice minimum wage for their age group.

For more info: [Hire an apprentice \(apprenticeships.gov.uk\)](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk) or call [08000 150 400](tel:08000150400). The National Skills Academy for Food & Drink has also produced a small business toolkit for businesses who wish to use apprenticeships: [All About Apprenticeships - National Skills Academy for Food & Drink \(nsafd.co.uk\)](https://www.nsafood.co.uk).

### (2) Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps are free, flexible courses of up to 16 weeks, co-designed with employers to respond to their skills shortages. They offer sector-specific skills and fast-track to an interview or new employment opportunity with an employer. They are available across England, offering training in digital, technical, construction, HGV

driving, and skills that support the green economy. The courses can be used as a pathway to an accelerated apprenticeship. [Detail of current availability](#)

How long does it take?: The courses last up to 16 weeks.

What will it cost?: There is no cost to the learner and no cost to the employer if Skills Bootcamps training is utilised to recruit Skills Bootcamp learners. If employers want to utilise Skills Bootcamps to upskill and retrain existing staff, they contribute up to 30% (depending on business size). Employers and providers work together to deliver Skills Bootcamps, bidding for either national or local MCA-managed funding. You can work with other employers and a provider to develop a bid.

For more info: [Find a Skills Bootcamp - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### (3) Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPS)

SWAPs help prepare those receiving unemployment benefits to apply for jobs in a different area of work and help businesses recruit or train staff through fully-funded pre-employment training.

How long does it take?: SWAPs last up to six weeks, and consist of three parts: (i) Pre-employment training – a short module of vocational training run by a local college or training provider; (ii) Work experience with an employer in the industry, where a jobseeker can learn new skills on the job; (iii) At the end of the programme, either a job interview with an employer in the sector or if an interview cannot be offered, help with the application process.

What will it cost?: SWAPs training is free, but you may incur business costs.

For more info: Contact the Employer Services Line on **0800 169 0178**.

## Additional resources

The [National Skills Academy for Food and Drink](#) helps UK Food and Drink manufacturers to develop, grow and strengthen workforce skills and attract future talent. They promote industry career opportunities, support firms in their apprenticeship offer and match quality-checked training providers to the precise professional development needs of your business and your people. As industry-led experts on skills, they act as an influential advocate to administrations of all UK nations on relevant skills policy.