

Catering courses

in the UK and Ireland

Catering covers cooking, catering management and bar skills, and there are a variety of courses available in the UK and Ireland. **Bethan Norris reports.**

English is the language increasingly used in kitchens worldwide," says Gill Hurst, from Tante Marie School of Cookery in Woking, UK. "Students usually come to the UK for their culinary course as it [provides an] opportunity to learn the language."

This ability to perfect English language skills while also gaining a qualification is a key reason for students increasingly choosing courses in the UK and Ireland. Frank McMahon, at Dublin Institute of Technology in Dublin, Ireland, testifies, "We receive several hundred applications from overseas [students] each year. [The] biggest growth has been [from] India."

Anne O'Connell, from Ballymaloe Cookery School in County Cork, Ireland, adds that international interest for courses at her school spans a wide range of student markets. "We could have up to 14 different nationalities on a particular course from the UK, USA, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Swaziland and mainland Europe," she says. "Ballymaloe has such a good reputation for food and is known worldwide – this attracts students."

For students undertaking any academic or vocational course overseas, the reputation of the country and college they

are studying in is vitally important for future career prospects. Jagdeep Sawhney, from Sakun International agency in India, has sent many students to study on catering courses in Ireland and Switzerland and says that they are popular with Indian students. "There is a lot of demand [in India] for candidates who possess [catering] qualifications from a good institute [in Europe]," he says. "Many students come back and join five-star hotels or start their own hotels."

However, the reasons given by students for studying in this field can be extremely varied and this is reflected in the wide range of courses on offer. "Each student may attend [our school] for a different reason," says O'Connell. "Some want to open their own restaurant, others just wish to learn how to cook, others want to use it to go travelling and work their way around the world as a cook."

To reflect this variation in student aims, colleges in the UK and Ireland offer a number of different courses which vary in length and the qualification awarded. Tante Marie Cookery School offers three Cordon Bleu qualifications ranging in length from 11 to 33 weeks, as well as a four-week essential skills course which is "popular with gap year and language students", according to Hurst.

And for students wanting to enter the management side of the catering business, a large number of longer-term degree and diploma courses are available, which focus on different specialist areas. "We offer a BSc in Hospitality Management, a Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, a Certificate in Hotel and Catering Supervision, a Certificate in Diet Cookery, a BA in Culinary Arts [and an] MSc in Hospitality Management," says McMahon. "[The] most recent change was the introduction of the BA in Culinary Arts in response to industry requests for a degree-level course in the area."

On most catering courses, however, the emphasis is on versatility. As Tom Moore from Northampton College in the UK asserts, "The majority of our courses include different areas of the hospitality industry, for example, kitchen, bar, restaurant and reception, because of the need for staff to be multi-skilled."

As Hurst points out, the skills learnt by students on a catering course can open many different doors. "Some of the jobs which our international students have gone on to include food journalism, private catering for royal families and politicians, seasonal work in ski resorts and on yachts, and working in top restaurants and hotels worldwide," she says. ○

Marketing overseas

While catering courses taught in the English language hold a lot of interest for overseas students, there is evidence that many catering colleges in the UK and Ireland may not be making the most of their international marketing opportunities. Tom Moore, from Northampton College in the UK, admits that his college does no international marketing, while Ballymaloe Cookery School in County Cork, Ireland, relies almost entirely on word-of-mouth. "Past students [spread] the word," says Anne O'Connell at the cookery school, adding, "Our 12-week courses usually book up approximately one year in advance."

Although full classes may restrict the necessity for intensive international marketing, some catering colleges in the UK and Ireland do make use of a range of marketing tools. "We use the website, an international students prospectus, appoint agents and attend fairs in China and India," says Frank McMahon, from Dublin Institute of Technology in Ireland. He adds, "[Student] fairs are very useful for major cities. Elsewhere, agents play a big role."

There is also evidence that computer-based marketing mediums are playing an increasingly wider role. Gill Hurst, from Tante Marie School of Cookery in Woking, UK, confirms, "Our website and CD-rom is our best overseas marketing tool."



Selection of institutions providing catering courses in the UK and Ireland

Ireland	Location	Use agents	No. of students	% int. students
Ballymaloe Cookery School	Shangarry, Co Cork		56	50
Berry Lodge Cookery	Co. Clare	✓	10	50
Cork Institute of Technology	Cork		10,000	4
Dublin Institute of Technology	Dublin	✓	1,500	1
UK				
Cookery at the Grange	Somerset		24	12
Hotel and Catering Training Co.	London		2,000	–
Leiths School of Food and Wine	London		96	12
Northampton College	Northampton		130	4
Tante Marie School of Cookery	Woking	✓	60	20