Food teaching has been a compulsory part of the national curriculum at Key stage 3 (ages 11-14) since September 2014[1]. All schools that follow the national curriculum have to teach food as part of Design and Technology including a new 'cooking and nutrition' requirement for primary and secondary schools. The background to this has been to both acknowledge the importance of learning about food in a broad and balanced curriculum, but also the desire to address the obesity crisis. Food teachers lead the way in addressing young people’s understanding of nutrition and are well placed to support behaviour change and offer practical ways to adopt a healthier lifestyle. The government has focused on the whole school plan that is central to addressing school food (in the curriculum and food service). This is formalised in the School Food Plan and is inspected in the new OFSTED inspection framework[2].

**Much more than ‘cooking’**

It is a mistake to think that teachers are simply teaching a set of recipes to be followed step by step. The cooking and nutrition section has clear themes, which set out the knowledge and skills to be taught. These include:

- Nutrition and healthy eating,
- Where food comes from,
- Characteristics and properties of ingredients,
- Cooking a repertoire of predominantly savoury dishes - for a healthy varied diet,
- Being competent in a range of cooking techniques,
- Sensory evaluation skills,
- Being able to adapt, create and use their own recipes.

In secondary schools, students bring their knowledge and skills together and apply them to develop recipes and dishes that are suitable for a specific person or situation. Home, leisure, health, agriculture and industry are listed as contexts for learning, which opens up many opportunities for teaching about growing, farming, product development, food science, catering and so on, as well as developing meals for the students themselves and their families.

There is no statutory number of hours for cooking, although there is an expectation that it will be regular, probably every week, with a greater focus on healthier recipes, practical learning and food science investigations. However, a number of issues that restrict the provision of high quality lessons were identified by OFSTED in its last detailed Food Technology report in 2006, including food’s low status in schools, lack of technician time, insufficient budgets for ingredients and class sizes that exceed health and safety limits. In addition, if a school is an Academy or Free School, the head teacher can chose not to follow the national curriculum, although many still choose to teach food lessons.

**New GCSE in Food Preparation and Nutrition**

Food teachers are preparing for a new GCSE in Food Preparation and Nutrition starting in 2016 (first examination in 2018), which will be offered by three exam boards: AQA[3], EDUQAS[4] and OCR[5].

The subject content focuses on students applying their knowledge and understanding of food science and technology, including:

- **Functional and chemical properties of foods** (proteins – denaturation, coagulation, gluten formation; carbohydrates – gelatinisation, dextrinisation, caramelisation; fats – shortening, aeration, plasticity,
Investigation tasks include:

- grade) and a Food Preparation task (15% of the final grade), an 8 hour Food Science Investigation.
- develop knowledge and understanding of the functional properties and chemical characteristics of food as well as a sound knowledge of the nutritional content of food and drinks,
- understand the relationship between diet, nutrition and health, including the physiological and psychological effects of poor diet and health,
- understand the economic, environmental, ethical and socio-cultural influences on food availability, production processes, diet and health choices,
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of functional and nutritional properties, sensory qualities and microbiological food safety considerations when preparing, processing, storing, cooking and serving food,
- understand and explore a range of ingredients and processes from different culinary traditions (traditional British and international) to inspire new ideas or modify existing recipes.

Typical examples of Food Science investigations and to help inspire a range of different ingredients, thicken a sauce. Investigate the working characteristics, function and predicting outcomes, using technical terminology correctly, evaluate the hypothesis and conform or review prediction, produce a 1,500-2,000 word report which evidences all of the above, is well structured and clearly expressed, uses technical terminology correctly and includes photographs and/or visual recordings to support the investigation.

This Food Science Investigation is a very exciting development and we encourage professional food scientists to become involved with schools and to help teachers and students to design and set up scientific testing. This may encourage many more young people to enter the food industry.

### A level

A decision by the current Minister for Schools, Nick Gibb, that Food A level would be axed in July 2015 was a disappointment to many food teachers. Teachers had hoped that a new A Level would be developed that could follow on from the new GCSE course. The Department for Education explained that university admissions systems preferred students to have A level Sciences and so that an A level in Food was not needed. Food will be the only national curriculum subject without an A Level and this lowers its status in the eyes of head teachers, parents and employers. With major skills shortages in the food industry and extreme concern about the public understanding of nutrition, food teachers play an important role in the general education of all young people. Very few teenagers have made up their minds at the age of 16 to pursue a full time vocational cookery based course. Many would welcome the opportunity to keep their options open with a wider range of A level courses, including Food as one of the choices.

Finding suitably qualified food teachers may become a problem in the future with reduced opportunities for food education in the curriculum. This may restrict the progression path from school courses, including Food as one of the A level courses, many would welcome the opportunity to keep their options open with a wider range of A level courses, including Food as one of the choices.

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www.fstjournal.org/features/30-1/careers-training/teaching-food

Louise T Davies is Lead Food Technology Consultant D&T Association and Founder of the Food Teachers Centre

Web: www.foodteacherscentre.co.uk