

Options with food science

Your skills

Over the course of your degree you develop a good mix of subject specific and technical skills as well as transferable core skills. Consider these alongside other achievements, such as paid work, volunteering, family responsibilities, sport, membership of societies, leadership roles, etc. Think about how these can be used as evidence of your skills and personal attributes. Then you can start to market and sell who you really are, identify what you may be lacking and consider how to improve your profile.

Employers are always asking for transferable skills, but what are they and which ones do you develop by studying food science? In addition to the knowledge of your subject and your technical abilities, what other skills do you acquire?

Given the nature of food science, you are likely to pick up good analytical and problem-solving skills and an ability to interpret data critically. Practical work helps your communication and teamworking skills, sharpening your attention to detail and ability to accurately record results. The use of ICT in support of experimental work and in the preparation and production of reports and assignments develops your ICT skills. You also improve your numerical and statistical awareness through practical and theoretical work. Group or individual projects give you experience of planning and organising your time (and that of others) and of researching and synthesising information. All of these skills are transferable to many areas of your life and work.

Employment prospects

Every year, statistics are collected to show what HE students do immediately after graduation. These can be a useful guide but, in reality, with the data being collected within just six months of graduation, many graduates are travelling, waiting to start a course, paying off debts, getting work experience or still deciding what they want to do. For further information about some of the areas of employment commonly entered by graduates of any degree discipline, check out 'What Do Graduates Do?' and the AGCAS Special Interest booklet 'Your Degree... What Next?'

Destination surveys show that in 2006, six months after graduation, over 61% of food science graduates were in full-time paid work, including self-employment, and just over 6% were in part-time work. Of these, the largest number - just under 26% - entered the engineering sector, most as food and drink technologists, with a small number going into quality control and food production. Just under 14% of all food science graduates in employment entered commercial and public sector management following their degree, 9% entered other professional and technical occupations and around 6% went into marketing, sales and advertising. Small numbers - around 3% in each case - went into health, education, and business.

Job options

Bear in mind that it's not just your degree discipline that determines your options. Get hold of the AGCAS Special Interest booklet 'Your Degree... What Next?' from your careers service. This looks more generally at the options for today's graduates and offers informed advice on career planning. Or try 'What jobs would suit me?', an online career planning tool, at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/ppanner.

You can choose between jobs that are degree-related or those that appeal because they use other interests or elements of your degree.

Jobs directly related to your degree

- [Dietitian](#) - this work will appeal if you're attracted to the nutritional aspects of food science. It involves both a therapeutic and preventative role. Qualification as a dietitian is a two-year postgraduate diploma course. Candidates need to have a good knowledge of biochemistry and physiology, as well as an ability to relate well to people.
- [Food technologist](#) or [Scientist, product development](#) - works in three main areas: product development, quality assurance, and retailing - with a potential overlap between all three. Aims to produce food which is safe and nutritious with a consistent flavour, colour and texture. Develops new, and modifies existing products and processes. Works in industry but also government and local authority food inspection departments.
- [Scientist, industrial research](#) - some large companies undertake fundamental research into food and food components such as starches, emulsions, proteins and flavours. Most research in the food industry is concerned with developing new products or modifying existing ones. Opportunities exist in food and pharmaceutical companies plus civil service departments and research associations.

Jobs where your degree would be useful

- [Industrial buyer](#) or [Retail buyer](#) - procures or purchases the highest quality and appropriate quantity of goods and services at the most competitive rate to meet user need according to specified criteria. The work requires continuous development of market knowledge and contacts for new products and services.
- [Production manager](#) - takes responsibility for all stages of the manufacture of a product including the planning, coordination and control of industrial processes. This can present a range of challenges, both technically and in terms of managing production workers.
- [Quality assurance manager](#) - acts to ensure that each product is of the correct materials, correctly made, properly packed, transported, labelled and up to standard when released to the customer. Responsible for maintaining the quality system and giving advice on it.

Although for many graduates the jobs listed here might not be their first, they are among the many realistic possibilities with your degree, provided you can demonstrate you have the attributes employers are looking for. It's worth noting that many graduate vacancies don't specify particular degree disciplines.

To find out more about the above options and other jobs, see AGCAS Occupational Profiles and other sources of occupational information available in careers services. Occupational Profiles are also available on www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations.

Where are the jobs?

Food scientists usually work for major food manufacturers, or within a government department developing food policy. Food scientists are also employed by retailers and food producers.

Refer to the following sectors for more information and further roles:

- [Environmental, food chain and rural](#) - land based economies still play a large part in the UK and indeed the world's social and economic development. Food scientists work in a range of areas within this sector, which looks at agriculture and animal-related areas as well as fresh produce and retail.

- [Food and drink](#) - from the manufacture of food through to the delivery and service of foods in hotels and restaurants.
- [Health](#) - working in the health sector can offer a range of opportunities for food scientists, especially if you want to move into career areas such as a dietitian.

Career management is an ongoing process, one that you'll no doubt develop all your working life. For further information on all the above employment areas, visit www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs or ask to see the AGCAS Sector Briefings at your careers service.

Further study

Destination surveys show that in 2006, six months after graduation, just over 22% of food science graduates had gone on to further study; of these, 8% were combining work with study. Most food science graduates who choose to do further study take either a higher degree, which is useful for pursuing a career in research, or a professional qualification. Some study taught MSc courses in related or unrelated topics; some do a professional qualification such as a dietetics diploma (two years full-time); or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), or Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Scotland, in order to become a teacher. This takes one year full-time and you'll get a bursary to help you with your finances. Others find places on science-related PhDs.

These trends show only what previous graduates in your subject did immediately upon graduating. Over the course of their career - the first few years in particular - many others will opt for some form of further study, either part-time or full-time. If further study interests you, start by taking a look at the AGCAS Special Interest booklet 'Postgraduate Study and Research' or the 'Further study' section of www.prospects.ac.uk. For a comprehensive list of courses, see 'Prospects Postgraduate Directory'.

Refer too to the 'Prospects Postgraduate Funding Guide', the AGCAS Special Interest booklet 'Postgraduate Study and Research' and AGCAS Vocational Course Surveys for further details relating to finance and the application process.

Other options

Don't forget there are alternatives to entering employment or postgraduate study, such as taking time out, volunteering or travelling. Longer term, you may want to consider starting your own business. Check out the AGCAS Special Interest booklets 'Beyond Nine to Five: Flexible Working', 'Self-employment' and 'Working Abroad', all available from your careers service.

Organisations which may offer relevant volunteering opportunities include projects to improve nutrition among disadvantaged groups. Schemes to feed the homeless community, to provide low-cost, nutritious food or to encourage low-income families to eat more healthily are available in many areas. Fareshare (<http://www.Fareshare.org.uk>), who distribute surplus food from food retailers and wholesalers to the homeless community and other disadvantaged groups, take volunteers. Local voluntary opportunities can be found on the Do-it (<http://www.do-it.org.uk>) website.

What next?

This should have started you thinking about your future. Whatever stage you are at, your careers service will be able to help you. A huge number of resources, including most of those mentioned here, plus a wide range of other services, including individual careers guidance, employer presentations and workshops on topics such as successful applications and interview techniques, are likely to be on offer.

A full list of useful resources plus case studies of graduates in this subject can also be found on www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.

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