

National Competitions



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Culinary Arts Technical Handbook 2026

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Sponsors

Craft Guild of Chefs



WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK is an independent charity and a partnership between employers, education and governments. Together, they are raising standards in apprenticeships and technical education to enable more young people get the best start in work and life.

They are leading the charge to ensure that all young people have equal access to high quality apprenticeships and technical education, by:

- inspiring young people through their careers advice resources, to choose excellence through apprenticeships and technical education as a prestigious career route on their path to reaching their potential, whatever their background.
- developing excellence in young people by testing and assessing their skills and knowledge against their peers through their national and international competitions programmes, improving their confidence and potential.
- innovating to mainstream global excellence to help improve the standard of teaching, training and assessment through international benchmarking to help young people, employers and the UK economy succeed.

They are also part of WorldSkills, a global movement supported by over 80 member countries, which celebrates young people achieving world-class standards in the biennial 'skills Olympics.

[This link](#) can be used to access more information about WorldSkills UK and the work it undertakes:

Sector Overview

Culinary Artists have a good knowledge of all aspects of a modern kitchen including basic butchery, fishmonger and bakery, along with good cookery and presentation skills.

Responsible for the high-quality production of food served to customers in a retail dining situation; culinary artists work with raw ingredients to create complex and intricate dishes to be served to customers. They may also be responsible for the creative aspect of compiling a menu.

This competition assesses the skills and abilities of competitors entering the field of Culinary Arts. Candidates will be expected to have a good knowledge of all aspects of a modern kitchen, along with

Career Pathway

A career in Culinary Arts offers a diverse and rewarding journey, blending creativity with technical expertise. Below is a structured career pathway for aspiring Culinary Artists

1. Entry-Level Positions (0-2 years experience)

Commis Chef / Apprentice Chef – Start in a professional kitchen, assisting senior chefs and learning fundamental skills in butchery, fishmonger, bakery, and cooking.

Prep Cook – Focus on ingredient preparation, basic cooking techniques, and kitchen organisation.

2. Entry-Level Positions (3-7 years experience)

Chef de Partie (Line Cook) – Specialize in a specific section (e.g., pastry, grill, sauces) while improving efficiency and speed.

Sous Chef – Act as the second-in-command in the kitchen, managing staff and overseeing food quality.

Menu Developer / Food Stylist – Utilize creativity to design menus and enhance food presentation.

3. Entry-Level Positions (8+ years experience)

Head Chef / Executive Chef – Lead a kitchen, manage operations, oversee menu creation, and ensure high-quality food production.

Restaurant Owner / Entrepreneur – Open a personal dining establishment or food-related business.

Culinary Instructor / Consultant – Teach aspiring chefs or advise restaurants on menu development and kitchen management.

Specialization & Additional Career Options

Pastry Chef / Baker – Master baking and dessert creation.

Private Chef – Cook for high-profile clients or families.

Food Critic / Writer – Explore food journalism and critique culinary experiences.

Research & Development Chef – Innovate new recipes and food products for the industry.

Competition Cycle 2026

Date	Stage
2 March – 27 March	Registration
2 March – 4 April	Entry Stage
May – June (specific dates and locations to be confirmed)	National Qualifiers
6 July	Announcement of finalists
W/C 16 November	National Finals

Competition Overview

About the Competition

This competition assesses the skills and abilities of competitors entering the field of Culinary Arts

This competition consists of:

- Entry Stage, a remote assessment in which you must complete work in your own time and submit this for judging.
- A qualifying heat, which will be in person. You must attend and complete a series of tasks on a specific day, or a set of tasks that you will be sent and must be completed within a given time scale.
- A UK national final, taking place in South Wales in the week commencing 16 November 2026 as part of WorldSkills National Finals.
- Selection for International Competitions

Core competencies

Competitors taking part in this competition should be able to

Competence	Heat %	UK Final %
Understanding of theoretical concepts in relation to products.	20	10
A good understanding of preparation and cooking techniques working in a safe environment.	40	60
Good understanding of how to balance textures and flavours.	40	30

Qualifications

This competition is mapped out to the following qualifications:

England, Wales, Northern Ireland

NVQ level 3. Advanced Technical diploma in professional cookery

Scotland-SVQ Level 3/4

Assessment Criteria

1. Technical Skills – Knife skills, cooking methods, preparation techniques.
2. Creativity & Innovation – Unique ingredient combinations and plating artistry.
3. Presentation & Hygiene – Cleanliness, organisation, and overall visual appeal of the dish.
4. Taste & Texture – Balance of flavours, seasoning accuracy, and texture of the final product.
5. Time Management – Efficient use of time and multitasking skills in the kitchen.
6. Waste Management – Minimizing food waste and efficient ingredient usage.

Each category is scored based on competency levels:

Competent – Meets the minimum standard with some errors.

Proficient – Demonstrates good understanding with minor errors.

Excellence – Displays expert-level execution with precision.

Entry Criteria

- This is an individual competition.
- There is no limit to the number of competitors permitted to enter this competition per organisation.
- Competitors must be familiar with the core competencies (these can be found in the 'Useful resources' section below) and must not have more than 3 years' industry experience.
- Competitors must be working towards or have completed a relevant Level 3 qualification or equivalent in the last 12 months.

Competition specific rules

A completed registration is an indication that you have agreed to the following:

- a) WorldSkills UK Competition Rules
- b) WorldSkills UK Terms and Conditions

Please ensure that you are familiar with these documents ahead of any competition activity: [Competition Rules 2025 - WorldSkills UK](#)

In addition to this, please familiarise yourself with the rules below which are specific to the Culinary Arts competition:

- All Competitors must wear a chef's jacket, long black or finely chequered trousers, safety shoes, and hats with hairnets if hair is long.
- No jewelry is allowed with the exception of a plain banded wedding ring which has no stones.;
- All Competitors must know how to use all the equipment on site before starting the Competition (this will be done on the familiarisation period);
- All Competitors must be aware of all dangers associated in working in a kitchen and be aware of the specific Health, Safety, and Environment regulations of the Competition Organizer.
- There is to be no coaching from the side lines, as this may result in disqualification.
- Mentors/lecturers are not allowed in the competition area unless this has been agreed with the lead judge/judge's

Pre-competition Activity

Before registering to enter students and apprentices to take part in a WorldSkills UK Competition, it can be helpful to enable them to practice, test and challenge their technical and mental skills by getting involved [in the pre-competition activity](#), available on the bottom of the webpage. As well, the following activities could be used to support prospective competitors to get a feel for what will be expected of them in a WorldSkills UK Competition, whilst still in an environment with which they are familiar:

- WorldSkills UK or other externally run competitions
- internal competitions e.g. internal to an employer, specially designed competitions - using WSUK competition briefs
- local competitions e.g. in colleges and training providers

Entry Stage

Competitors must submit a specific online entry and follow all guidelines. Judges will assess creativity, technique, and presentation. The registration period opens from 2 March to 27 March. Competitors who register will be sent a link to the task and will be able to complete this once their registration has been completed.

National Qualifier

Competitors who were successful at the entry stage will be invited to National Qualifiers. These will take place between May and June 2026. At this stage competitors will complete a timed practical assessment of skills using a brief which will be received in advance. All dishes must be produced as described. Locations of qualifiers are held across the UK, but competitors will be able to select their preferred venue at registration.

National Final

The National Finals will take place at various locations across South Wales in the week commencing 16 November 2026. Held over the course of two days, the final involves a multi-course meal preparation. Competitors must demonstrate advanced techniques, presentation, and efficiency under time constraints.

WorldSkills UK International competitions

Beyond the national finals, there are a host of opportunities for competitors. Eligible competitors who show the highest skills, passion, and drive from the national finals will be given the opportunity to compete to train for the EuroSkills and WorldSkills International competitions. The winners from national final competitions who are not eligible for international competitions may join the Skills Champions programme, which allows continued involvement, including the opportunity to work with WorldSkills UK and visit schools, colleges, and events to inspire the next generations.

- We identify competitors from our national finals each year, who meet the criteria* for the opportunity to join the international competition development programme towards the next WorldSkills Competition.
- Competitors from each national final will be assessed for their eligibility and will be contacted shortly after the national final competition has finished if they meet the three points of criteria*. We will ask them whether they would be interested in joining our phase 3 stage which is typically a training and assessment event over 2-4 days during February and March.
- If the Competitor meets the standard assessed at the phase 3 assessment, they will be invited to join Squad UK. This usually represents around 3-5 competitors or teams in each of our international skills, (typically, between 120 – 150 competitors will become Squad UK)
- Squad UK competitors undertake approximately 30 days of technical training across a 12-month period as well as attending 3-4 bootcamps to develop high performing attributes and a competition mindset. This is a competitive process and we are ultimately working towards the selection of the 30-35 competitors who will be selected to represent the UK at international competition. (Please note, this decision is made around March, one year into the cycle, but competitors may be withdrawn at any point if we feel they have not demonstrated the commitment or potential to achieve the standard required.)
- From April of the year of competition, we take the 30-35 competitors forward to train intensively towards the WorldSkills Competition. These competitors are now known as Team UK and they will undertake around 25 day's technical training as well as attendance at one final bootcamp during this five-month period.
- Although the training manager for each of the skills is responsible for creating and leading the training and development plan, the competitors will have a team of specialist trainers and coaches around them who will support their development on all topics from lean working, mindset development, time management and presentation skills.
- To maximise the full value and advantages of our programme, competitors are advised to ensure they have the full support of friends, family and employers.
- To ensure our programme is inclusive and accessible to all, expenses are all paid for and there is a small fund to

support competitors who, for example may find themselves taking unpaid leave to attend training.

***Criteria for identification as potential Squad UK competitors for participation in WS Aichi 2028**

1. You must be 22 or under in the year of competition for most skills so your date of birth must be on or after 01.01.2006. (The exceptions to this are skills for which you must be no older than 25 in the year of competition so your date of birth must be on or after 01.01.2003 and this applies to the following seven skills: Additive Manufacturing, Aircraft Maintenance, Cyber Security, Digital Construction, Industry 4.0, Mechatronics, Robot Systems Integration.)
2. You must be competing in a skill that progresses to international competition. (Typically, around 30 skills, which is confirmed at the start of every cycle, dependant on funding.)
3. You must have achieved a minimum standard in the national finals' competition. (Usually 65%.)

Alternatively, if training is of interest to you, you could consider supporting WorldSkills UK with organising and training, and even helping to run the National Finals.

Judges' Top Tips

- Master fundamental techniques before attempting advanced skills.
- Keep a clean and organized workstation.
- Understand flavour balancing and plating aesthetics.
- Manage time effectively during tasks.
- Stay calm and confident under pressure.

"Cooking is an art, but all art requires knowing something about the techniques and materials." – Nathan Myhrvold

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