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# Rising Skills

Emerging Skills in the Food  
Services Trades





The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada.

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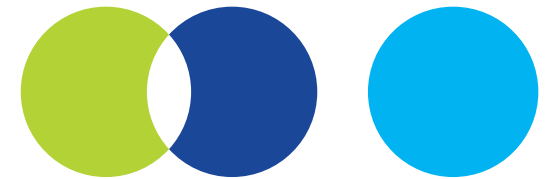
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## Key findings

- Four trends are defining the future of food services trades: automated cooking and baking processes, labour shortages, the increasing popularity of mobile apps for restaurants, and the growing use of social media.
- To address these shifts, food services tradespeople need communication, adaptability, client relations, management, and creativity skills.
- Employers face challenges recruiting and retaining newcomers.
- Resilience is needed now more than ever in the food services sector. As employers and tradespeople grapple with the impacts of COVID-19 on the accommodation and food services industry, resilience, adaptability, and other social and emotional skills are becoming more important.
- The following suggestions can help strengthen training and upskilling for tradespeople in the Canadian food services sector:
  - Prioritize social and emotional skills in apprenticeship training.
  - Raise awareness of the meaningful career opportunities in the food services trades.
  - Adjust the Provincial Nominee Programs to include cooks, chefs, and bakers in regions facing labour shortages in these occupations.
  - Raise awareness of the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

# Introduction

**Commercial kitchens are becoming more automated, connected, and diverse workplaces. Repetitive tasks are being automated, freeing up time for workers. Food-delivery apps and the increasing use of social media are changing the way customers and restaurants interact. And labour shortages mean employers need to work harder to find the skilled talent they need, especially Red Seal-certified cooks.**



In interviews conducted for this briefing, food services tradespeople described social and emotional skills as the most important skill set needed to adapt to changes in their workplaces. Employers, tradespeople, and instructors commonly emphasized the need for tradespeople who are resilient and creative and who can communicate well and manage client relations.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the accommodation and food services sector have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Although the full story of these impacts is still unfolding, SMEs will need access to talent with resilience, client relations skills, and other human skills to help their firms adapt to the post-COVID-19 reality.

Tradespeople consulted for this briefing were cooks and bakers, particularly in the Red Seal trades. Although not all apprentices, journeypersons, and trainers were Red Seal-certified, we primarily consulted trades that are common to most jurisdictions across Canada and approved for Red Seal status.

The [Red Seal program](#) sets common standards to assess the skills of tradespeople across Canada.



<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME Policy Responses.”

# Four trends in the food service trades

Food services industry stakeholders see four key trends that will define the future of food services trades:

- regional labour shortages
- increasing use of automated cooking and baking processes
- rising use of mobile food applications
- growing uptake of social media for marketing

## Tackling regional labour shortages

Industry stakeholders are keen to fill regional labour shortages. They are looking to recruit diverse talent and help students complete their programs. In the food services sector, the largest Red Seal trade is that of cook. Although the overall projected supply of certified cooks in Canada is aligned with demand for 2020 to 2024, several jurisdictions are expecting shortages in this time period. In Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada, the projected demand for certified cooks exceeds projected apprenticeship completions.<sup>2</sup> On a positive note, the national number of completed cook apprenticeships increased by a strong 67 per cent between 2014 and 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Recruiting newcomers to Canada is one way to help address regional labour shortages. Yet, we heard that employers face challenges recruiting and retaining newcomers. Some had issues

completing the paperwork, while others said they would have been more successful if cooks were included in their province's stream of the federal Provincial Nominee Program.

COVID-19 has hit the accommodation and food services sector especially hard. We heard from stakeholders who are finding creative ways to help apprentices graduate from their programs in the food services trades. In Atlantic Canada, industry and post-secondary leaders have worked together to move refresher courses for Red Seal exams online for cooks. These kinds of COVID-19 adaptations will be necessary to meet strong regional demands for cooks, professional cooks, and chefs over the next four years.

## Automation

Cooks and bakers will need resilience and creativity to adjust to the rise of automation in the food services industry. Larger hotel and restaurant chains have started automating certain repetitive processes. Some smaller employers indicated that the size of their operations prohibited investment in automation technologies.

Industry leaders discussed several recent technological advancements in the food services industry. The use of automated point of sale (POS) systems primarily affects front-line staff. Automated cooking and baking processes, however, affect how tradespeople perform their jobs and where they spend their energy. These processes include combi steamers, robotic kitchen components, and sous vide methods.

<sup>2</sup> Prism Economics and Analysis, *Apprentice Demand in Red Seal Trades: A 2020 National Labour Market Information Report*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“ [Newcomers] would need someone to show them, but it should be a very short learning curve compared to somebody who has not cooked before. They’ve cooked before, they’ve worked already, and they’re actually qualified because they also graduated from foreign hospitality school.”

Food services industry leader

“ We had a small group of Red Seal chefs that ... were going to meet as a group to review areas that they felt they needed ... a refresher on, so that they would be able to ... get the Red Seal designation. And then COVID came along, and so we couldn’t do it, or so we thought. And I went back to the college, and we had a conversation, and we said, ‘but why ... can’t we look outside the box here?’ That we can’t get them together in person [and] ... do it virtually – like use Zoom or something like that.”

Industry leader



Automated cooking and baking processes can reduce strain on workers’ bodies and open up time for workers to focus on creative tasks. For example, sous vide cooking—the process of sealing food in an airtight container and cooking it in temperature-controlled water—reduces the amount of time cooks spend preparing a dish, giving them more time to apply creativity skills to the presentation of the dish.

An estimated 70 per cent of employment in the accommodation and food services sector is at high risk of automation. Work tasks that require adapting to novel situations, creativity, and social components, however, are less susceptible to automation.<sup>4</sup> Cooks, for instance, perform many tasks that require creativity, a fine sense of smell, and the ability to quickly adapt recipes to novel situations.<sup>5</sup> Beyond trade-specific knowledge, creativity and resilience can help tradespeople adapt to these changes.

### Food apps

Food delivery apps are affecting the pace of kitchen work. Tradespeople need resilience and time management skills to adapt to multiple ordering platforms and decreased down time.

Delivery apps, such as SkipTheDishes, Uber Eats, and DoorDash, present new opportunities and challenges for the sector. These apps increase customer awareness and drive business to restaurants, but they also eat into the business’s bottom line through a commission paid on each order.

<sup>4</sup> Oschinski and Wyonch, *Future Shock?*

<sup>5</sup> Red Seal Program, “Cook – National Occupational Analysis.”

Although alcohol sales revenue is reduced in jurisdictions where alcohol delivery is not permitted with food orders, recent legislative changes in Ontario in response to COVID-19 have allowed for the sale of alcohol with food delivery. In April 2020, workers, including delivery drivers, could complete Smart Serve certification training for free, preparing them to work where alcohol is sold, served, or sampled in Ontario. The initiative, designed to support an increase food services delivery, led to 100,000 enrolments, according to Smart Serve Ontario.<sup>6</sup> Although not targeted to apprenticeable trades, the initiative shows how training programs are adapting to disruption in the sector.

Food delivery apps can also change the pace of work in kitchens. Stakeholders reported a decrease in downtime that restaurants would normally use to prepare for the dinner rush.

### Social media advertising

Restaurant owners and caterers are taking advantage of social media to build clientele and the reputation of their restaurant. In this context, tradespeople require knowledge of digital media and the ability to apply social and emotional skills in a digital environment—for instance, the ability to use social media applications to communicate and maintain relations with clients.<sup>7</sup>

Digital skills are especially important for independent operators and tradespeople who own their own business; however, those working in the kitchen are also affected because they may be responsible for documenting their work and sending it along to staff responsible for promotions.

<sup>6</sup> Smart Serve Ontario, "Ontario's Alcohol Training Program Reaches 100,000 Enrollments."

<sup>7</sup> Bieler, *Bridging Generational Divides*.

**"I've been into one of those gourmet burger places in the middle of the afternoon .... There's 30 or 40 instances [in an hour] where there's a driver pulling up ... to get food in the middle of the day. The afternoon is your typical slowdown so you can get prepped for your evening service, and the workload is constant now."**

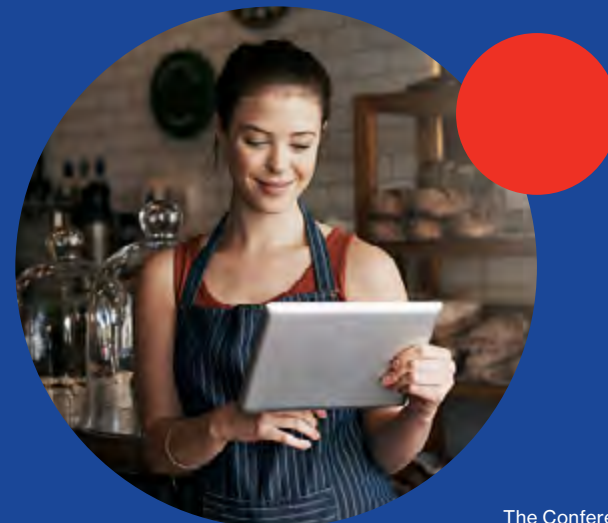
Industry leader

**"I have a neighbour who does food prep. She's been a chef for years, and now she does food prep. She promotes that through social media."**

Restaurant employer

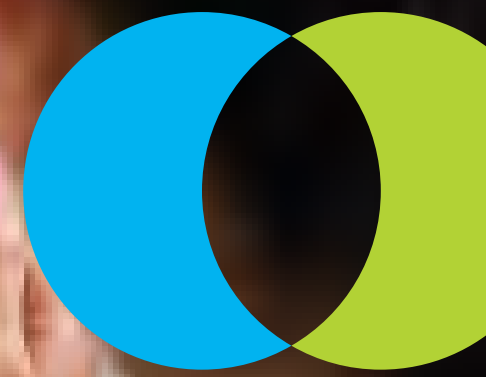
**"I use Instagram and Facebook because that gets the product out. Young people are always on their phones and doing something online. You try to hit those people up as much as you can."**

Restaurant employer





**Food delivery apps can also change the pace of work in kitchens. Stakeholders reported a decrease in downtime that restaurants would normally use to prepare for the dinner rush.**



# Human skills

Stakeholders described the increasing importance of social and emotional skills in adapting to technology trends and an increasingly multi-generational and diverse workplace.

**Communication skills:** Tradespeople need communication and active listening skills to identify and accommodate the preferences of different generations in the kitchen. For instance, to accommodate older journeypersons' preference for in-person or voice communication, apprentices may need to use a voice call instead of a text message.

Tradespeople, caterers, and restaurant owners in our consultations also felt they needed to adapt to a more diverse customer base. With a more diverse workforce and clientele, stakeholders observed that tradespeople in their own enterprise need stronger communication, client relations, and cultural competency skills.

**Resilience and adaptability:** Journeypersons and employers need to adapt to the evolving preferences of apprentices, including a desire for greater workplace flexibility.

**Client relations and cultural competence:** Tradespeople and employers need to be aware of changing cultural and gender norms in their relations with clients—for instance, gender-neutral language is becoming an important part of client relations. In addition, journeypersons and employers claim old-school mentalities and harassment are still commonplace in commercial kitchens, and so cultural competency skills can help create a more inclusive, welcoming workplace.

**Management skills:** As food delivery apps shift the volume and timing of restaurants' workloads, management skills become more important. This includes managing time to ensure in-house and delivery orders are fulfilled, balancing competing priorities, and managing relationships with in-house staff, delivery drivers, and customers.

**Creativity:** Automating repetitive cooking and baking processes opens up time for tradespeople to be more creative. At the same time, work tasks that require workers to adapt to novel situations or that involve social and creative components are less susceptible to automation.<sup>8</sup>

## What needs to happen?

The following suggestions could strengthen apprenticeship training and post-certification upskilling for tradespeople in the Canadian food services sector:

- **Prioritize social and emotional skills in apprenticeship training.** Given that tradespeople need social and emotional skills to adapt to emerging trends in the food services sector, it is important that these skills be integrated into both technical and on-the-job training. Tradespeople in the food services sector indicated that they would prefer to learn social and emotional skills through in-person training, rather than online. Many of these skills could be delivered via mentoring relationships between journeypersons and apprentices.

<sup>8</sup> Oschinski and Wyonch, *Future Shock?*

- **Elevate perceptions of the food services trades and raise awareness of meaningful career opportunities in the sector.** Young people make up a large proportion of the food services labour force. It is important to ensure that they remain interested in pursuing food services careers and are retained in the sector. (See “[A promising initiative.](#)”)
- **Adjust Provincial Nominee Program streams.** The Provincial Nominee Program is a way for provinces to recruit foreign workers who want to become permanent residents and have the skills, education, and experience to contribute to their regional economy.<sup>9</sup> But not all provinces that are experiencing labour shortages for cooks, chefs, and bakers have a designated stream recruiting these tradespeople.
- **Raise employer awareness of the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce.** Some benefits include lower staff turnover, higher sales, and increased brand value.<sup>10</sup> Raising awareness will incentivize employers to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce, such as by prioritizing employees’ social and emotional skills and helping staff adapt to shifting cultural and gender norms. This is key to recruiting and retaining youth, newcomers, and marginalized groups in the sector.

## A promising initiative: Be Our Guest

A Toronto-based partnership of hotels and educational institutions promotes the recruitment and retention of young people in the food and hospitality sector through a program called Be Our Guest. This program offers high school students a mix of classroom and work-integrated learning. After completing health and safety training and other classroom-based lessons, students complete a co-op placement and a job-shadowing rotation at a hotel, giving them a sense of career opportunities and introducing them to leaders in the sector. Programs like Be Our Guest have an important role to play in introducing youth to career opportunities in the food and hospitality sector.<sup>11</sup>



“I got in trouble last week because I had this big table, and I hadn’t seen this table, so I introduced myself. And I made one mistake – I said, ‘ladies and gentlemen,’ which is apparently politically incorrect now. So, someone actually made that comment. It ended up that I comped their appetizer because I was worried about a bad review.”

Restaurant employer

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada, “How the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Works.”

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, “How to Create a Positive and Inclusive Workplace.”

<sup>11</sup> Cairn, “Be Our Guest Program Honours First Graduates.”

# What are we doing?

Together, the Conference Board and the Future Skills Centre are bringing together apprenticeship stakeholders to better understand the emerging skills needed to adapt to sector-specific future work trends. Through our work we aim to:

- discover ways to bridge the gaps between the skills that will be needed and how those skills are integrated into apprenticeship training in Canada;
- identify innovations that address emerging digital, social and emotional, and green skills needs in Canada's apprenticeship systems;
- provide a roadmap for Canada to bring the best training possible to our newest generation of tradespeople – training that fosters the lifelong learning for them to adapt at all stages of their career.

## Digital toolbox

As part of the **Future Skills Centre's** research project on social and emotional skills, **The Conference Board of Canada** has developed a digital toolbox that summarizes key approaches and tools for SES assessment. The digital platform provides a curated guide to key SES measurement resources. [Check out this platform](#) to learn more about ways to measure social and emotional skills and to find out more about applied studies on SES measurement and development.



# Appendix A

## Methodology

### Who we spoke to

We spoke to 53 stakeholders from across Canada, including 29 food services stakeholders and 24 apprenticeship stakeholders with responsibility across multiple skilled trade sectors. We conducted in-person and virtual focus groups and semi-structured interviews to consult eight apprentices, five journeypersons, 14 industry leaders, 11 training leaders, six workforce development executives, and nine apprenticeship authority representatives.

Participants contributed to a dialogue on the emerging skills that tradespeople will need so they can adapt to the future of work, particularly in the Red Seal trades. These consultations were part of a larger apprenticeship research project in which we spoke to 175 apprenticeship stakeholders from multiple trade sectors.

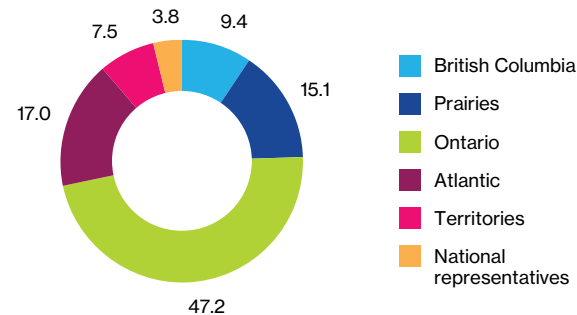
Data collection occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we followed up with one industry leader after the pandemic to gain perspective on the impact of the pandemic on industry priorities, including in relation to apprenticeships.

We spoke with cooks, chefs, and bakers in focus groups. The cooks and bakers who participated included apprentices and journeypersons. Cooks who had advanced to chef positions or to restaurant owners also participated. Participants were at different stages of their career, including first-year apprentices, established journeypersons, tradespeople who had gone on to establish their own business, and tradespeople working as educators.

We spoke with food services and multi-sector apprenticeship stakeholders from Atlantic Canada, Central Canada, the Prairie provinces, Canada's West Coast, and the territories. Most stakeholders were from Ontario (47 per cent), followed by the Atlantic provinces (17 per cent) and the Prairies (15 per cent).

**Chart 1**

**Food services sector stakeholders consulted by region**  
(per cent)

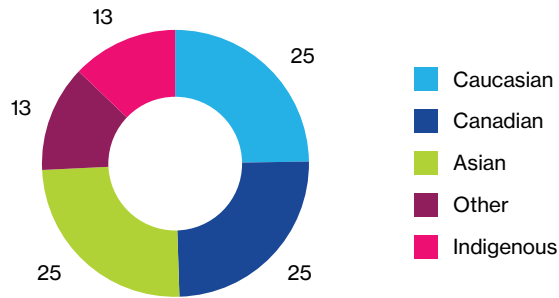


Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The proportion of focus group participants who self-identified with a visible minority group or as Indigenous was higher among apprentices (38 per cent) than among journeypersons and employers (27 per cent).

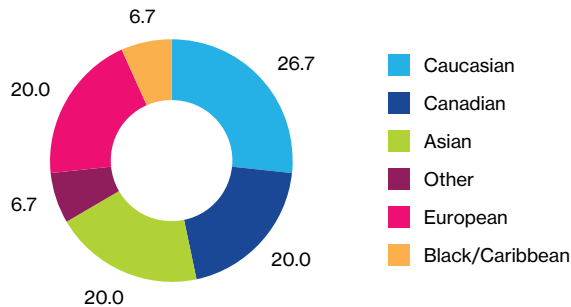


**Chart 2**  
**Self-identified ethnic background of apprentices**  
 (per cent)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

**Chart 3**  
**Self-identified ethnic background of journeypersons and employers**  
 (per cent)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Focus groups and key participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo 12 qualitative data management software. The dataset for the larger apprenticeship project that informed this briefing included 59 transcripts. We used a thematic coding process to analyze the transcript content. Following inductive analysis, frequency counts were used to quantify the breadth of representation of particular codes across sources. Word queries, text queries, and matrix queries were used to explore the dataset.

For the larger Bridging Generational Divides project, we reviewed 57 documents that were selected through structured and manual searches. Structured searches were completed in the following databases: ProQuest, Education Resources Information Center, and Sociological Abstracts. Search terms included “apprentice\*,” “skilled trade\*,” “lifelong learning,” “digital skills,” “digital literacy,” and “information and communication technology,” among others. Manual searches were completed in technical education journals and online databases of organizations with a focus on apprenticeship and/or technical and vocational education and training. Via these structured and manual searches, we obtained a total of 527 articles. After screening the abstracts for inclusion criteria, we identified 57 articles to include in the review. Although these articles were the analytic focus of the literature review, we also referenced other sources recommended by stakeholders and other advisors during the writing process.

\* indicates that we searched for multiple word endings of the associated term.



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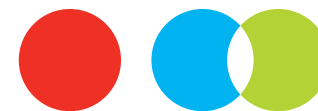
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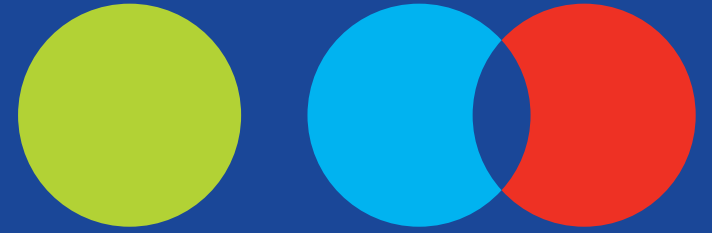
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