Brexit has meant the chef skills shortage in Britain has hit the headlines frequently over recent years. Research from KPMG has found that 25% of chefs and 75% of waiting staff in London are from continental Europe and that by 2029, the UK’s hospitality industry could have a deficit of more than a million workers.

But it’s not a problem that’s limited to the British Isles. Increased demand for chefs coupled with high rates of turnover in the sector have also led to significant deficits in the US, where it is estimated that an additional 200,000 line cooks and chefs will be needed by 2025.

Meanwhile, there are currently 38,000 unfilled chef vacancies in Australia, and 9,000 of the projected 23,500 additional chef jobs that will be needed in Canada between 2015 and 2035 are expected to go unfilled. There is also evidence of skills shortages in New Zealand and much of mainland Europe, including Germany, the Netherlands and France.

Increased demand for chefs coupled with high rates of turnover have led to a chronic skills shortage. Apprenticeships, improved working conditions and more automation could help turn the tide.

According to research by People 1st, an employer-led skills and quality assurance expert in the UK, a number of factors have contributed to the current crisis, including a shrinking labour pool, the changing nature of chef roles, too few chef apprentices entering the sector and too few full-time chef students entering and staying in the sector.

Indeed, figures suggest that there are almost three times as many chef students as are required to meet the current projections of 11,000 chefs needed by 2022 in the UK, but many of them are either failing to complete their studies or quitting when they see the reality of the job, which often involves antisocial hours, low pay and an aggressive atmosphere.
No silver bullet.

There are many ways caterers can seek to address these issues, such as developing their own apprenticeship schemes or teaming up with universities or catering schools. In France, for example, the latter is the norm. Each area has a state-funded catering school that provides staff for local foodservice businesses.

Caterers can also set themselves apart from the competition by offering chefs mentoring, support and recognition from day one of their employment. Flexible working hours, too, are becoming much more of an expectation and are increasingly being supported by mobile staffing and recruitment platforms such as Harri and Syft.

Finally, technological innovations – whether in payroll, purchasing or the kitchen itself – can go a long way to improving working conditions for younger members of staff, who love to work with efficient, modern equipment.

The SelfCookingCenter®, which is effectively a kitchen assistant, is a case in point. It can learn how a dish is best cooked, then automatically set the oven to the correct temperature, time and humidity, as well as carrying out all monitoring and checking, making life significantly less stressful in the kitchen.

In addition, both the VarioCookingCenter® and the SelfCookingCenter® free up time during the working day for young chefs to try out new techniques and develop their skills. Meanwhile roasting and cutting losses can be drastically reduced and the overnight maturing process ensures a tender, juicy final product.

Find out more: catering2019.com

Often reality of the job: Antisocial hours, low pay and an aggressive atmosphere.

There is no silver bullet to solve the chef skills shortage; neither apprenticeship schemes, improved working conditions or more automation will work on their own. But if hospitality businesses and the sector as a whole begin to evolve their practices, work together and introduce smarter technologies, improvements are inevitable.