

# **Business in the Parliament Conference 2025**

**Panel Session:** Looking to the Future: Skills in the Food and Drink Industry  
**Hosted by:** Scotland Food & Drink and Partnership Member - Food and Drink Federation Scotland

## **Overview**

Scotland's food and drink industry makes a significant economic contribution, with data from Food and Drink Scotland suggesting that it generates £5.3 billion in gross value add and contribute £8.1 billion in Scottish exports. The industry is a major employer across Scotland; agriculture, fishing, aquaculture and manufacturing employed 129,000 people in 2021.

A skilled workforce is key to meeting the challenges of reaching net zero while maintaining food security, and ensuring the industry and all businesses within it reach their potential. This panel will explore the skills needed to drive the industry forward, ensuring it not only adapts to current challenges but also thrives as a preferred career destination.

## **Session's Purpose**

This session will explore the skills and workforce needed to deliver economic growth whilst meeting net zero goals.

Discussions will include:

- The future skills and knowledge required across the industry.
- The role of apprenticeships and vocational education in upskilling and reskilling.
- Strengthening the skills pipeline from education to industry and the role of businesses, support bodies, and government.
- Enhancing the industry's appeal to those choosing or changing careers.
- Aligning education and industry needs through collaboration.
- The role of automation and advanced manufacturing in complementing skills and workforce development.

## **Potential Discussion Questions**

- How can we adapt to emerging skills demands to boost productivity, growth, and sustainability?
- How can we make the industry a career of choice?
- What needs to be done to increase the pipeline of skilled workers entering the industry?
- Does the current apprenticeship and upskilling funding model meet the needs of industry?
- How can collaboration help build a workforce equipped for future challenges?
- What role does technology play in shaping and supporting industry skills needs?

- How can we ensure the food and drink industry voice is heard in a competitive landscape?

## **Key Challenges and Opportunities**

The food and drink industry faces several people and skills-related challenges and opportunities, including:

- Adapting production and supply chains to an increasingly technological landscape.
- Driving continuous innovation to maintain a competitive edge and access new markets.
- Responding quickly and effectively to regulatory and market changes.
- Driving productivity and sustainability despite financial constraints.
- Building a resilient supply chain that withstands economic and environmental pressures.

## **About the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership**

The Scotland Food & Drink Partnership is a unique collaboration between industry organisations, Scottish Government and its agencies, and research institutes. Collaboration helps us understand industry needs and deliver impactful support.

## **Further Background**

The refreshed industry strategy, [\*Sustaining Scotland, Supplying the World\*](#), was launched by the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership in 2023. It supports responsible growth in three key markets: Scotland, the UK, and the rest of the world. The strategy targets a £4 billion increase in sector turnover by 2028, from £16 billion to £20 billion.

This strategy and its delivery programme will guide the sector over the next decade, supporting recovery and growth. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to own, operate, and work for a food and drink business. The industry will be recognised as a world leader in sustainable production and responsible growth, with resilient businesses across the supply chain.

Ensuring the right people with the right skills are in place is crucial. The Scottish Government and industry leaders are committed to making the sector a strong career choice with diverse opportunities for people across Scotland.

## **Next Steps**

Continue to explore the skills challenges facing businesses in the food and drink industry, finding and implementing solutions wherever possible.

In practice, this means:

- Identifying and filling skills gaps.
- Ensuring Scotland's skills development process meets industry needs.
- Boosting recruitment into the industry.

- Supporting the existing workforce, whose expertise is vital to the sector's success.