Attitudes and Perceptions of Careers in the Agriculture and Food Sector

Food Economy Task Force, Work Stream 1

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Commissioned by National Centre for Universities and Business
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Executive Summary

The UK food economy is strategically vital to the nation. It is also a major employer which supports many interesting careers. However, it needs a stronger talent pipeline to address its future challenges and become more competitive and sustainable. This will involve selling food economy careers to a wide range of young people, including many who would not presently regard it as a possible career choice. This report explores young people’s views of work in the food economy and suggests better ways of communicating the possibilities it offers.

In August 2014, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) commissioned CFE Research to provide survey evidence on attitudes to careers in the UK agriculture and food sector. In September 2014, we conducted two online surveys, one with 500 undergraduates studying a range of subjects, and another 154 recent entrants to the sector. The surveys gathered information on awareness and perceptions of careers in the sector, on individuals’ future plans, and on what influences their choices about whether to work in the sector.

Key findings

Undergraduates and recent entrants were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree.

Awareness of the sector is low: On average, undergraduates scored 3.2 when asked how far they agreed they have a good awareness of careers in the agriculture and food sector. When asked how far they agreed that young people in general have a good awareness of these career possibilities, both undergraduates and recent entrants gave low scores (2.9 and 2.5 respectively out of 7).

Only a minority of the undergraduates surveyed were planning a career in the agriculture and food sector, while recent entrants had generally not planned to work there when they started their higher education.

The sector is an unattractive career option: The agriculture and food industry has an image problem. Neither undergraduates nor recent entrants to the sector rated its attractiveness to new graduates highly (3.3 and 3.9 out of 7, respectively). Some parts of the industry have even lower appeal. For example, there may be negative pre-conceived ideas about manual agricultural jobs or jobs in hospitality. These sub-sectors stand to benefit from increased awareness of career possibilities and benefits that they offer.

Undergraduates are unaware of career options in food: Few undergraduates planned a career in the agriculture and food sector prior to undertaking their studies (1.8 out of 7). Even recent entrants to the industry had not planned to join the sector prior to their studies (3.0 out of 7). Reasons given by undergraduates for not considering a career in the sector included having other pre-existing career aspirations, a lack of interest in it, its low appeal, concern about low pay, low understanding of career paths into the sector, and a perception that it did not align with their studies.

Greater awareness of the sector as a career option is a key action to support increased interest: Survey respondents suggested doing this through improved general advertising and marketing of careers plus more specific information, advice, and guidance.

The food economy is in a competitive market for talent: Undergraduates who are not considering a career in the food economy say that they already have career plans in other sectors, emphasising the competition for skills between different industries and parts of the economy. They also discussed the sector’s lack of general
appeal, and mentioned worries about low pay. Students of subjects outside agriculture and food have little awareness of the industry's career paths. Better career information, directed in part at showing that a range of degree subjects are valuable to the sector, could be an important marketing message.

**Higher salaries might be needed in some areas:** Some undergraduates and recent entrants to the sector said that the food economy's attractiveness could be improved by higher salaries and other financial benefits, enabling agriculture and food to compete with other sectors for graduate talent more effectively.

**However, there are also grounds for optimism over the food economy’s attractiveness to talented people**

**Several positive influences attract graduates to the food economy:** Our survey results suggest that the prospect of a good career is the key influence on recent entrants to the sector, and on undergraduates considering a career there.

**The food economy matters, and is becoming more important:** Undergraduates and recent entrants agree that the food economy is vital to the UK, and that there will continue to be a strong demand for its work. This is a strong selling point and this message could be built upon in future marketing.

**It offers variety and progress:** A key point that makes the sector attractive to those who work in it is the sheer variety of career possibilities that exist there. This point is not well understood by undergraduates (or arguably, by society at large). Stressing the career possibilities in the sector could be a key action in attracting more people to work in agriculture and food.

**People like working in the food economy:** Recent graduate entrants to the sector are happy with their experience of it. They see their choice to enter the industry as one they are satisfied with and would recommend to others. Again, this could be a key part of the message used to attract new talent. Recent entrants emphasise the variety of career opportunities, the dynamism and potential for growth of the sector, as well as their sheer enjoyment of their jobs. All of these are strong messages for marketing the sector to new entrants. Recent entrants would recommend working in the sector to new graduates (average score 5.7 out of 7), agree that it is a good career option (5.7 out of 7), and say that they are satisfied with their career in the sector (5.5 out of 7).

**The food economy could be marketed positively to potential career switchers:** About a third of our sample of recent entrants to the food economy had previously worked in other industries. They had made the switch for a range of reasons. These include better job opportunities, career progress, and interesting work that, as one switcher put it, does not involve sitting at a computer all day. The food economy involves high-level science and technology, and is big business. But it also offers a satisfying connection to the basic human need for good food. This points to the need for conversion courses that can help people from a wide range of starting points to adapt to the food economy, not merely those who already have a background in science or technology.

**Placements and spells of work experience are an effective way of interesting young people in food economy jobs:** Seeing the food economy from the inside makes its attractions apparent to young people. The action point is to ensure that these insights are available to students of any subject, and to young people generally, not just to students of food-related disciplines. At the moment, most such placements and work experience spells are associated with specific university courses and are therefore limited in impact. This wider offer could form part of an overall process in which the industry is marketed to students on a full range of degree courses.

**The survey highlights action points for attracting more talent:** Marketing and information provisions are needed to raise awareness of graduate careers in the food economy. A key priority is to reach undergraduates on degree programmes that are not specifically linked to agriculture and food. Feedback from recent entrants suggests that a very positive story can be told about job security and personal development in the sector, as well as the interest and satisfaction of working in it.
01. Introduction and Method

This report gives the findings of a survey concerning attitudes and perceptions to working in the agriculture and food sector on the part of undergraduates and recent entrants to the industry.

Background

The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) has launched a Task Force to look at ways of boosting the UK’s food economy through improved collaboration between businesses, universities, and government. One of its three streams of work concerns talent acquisition and development. The agriculture and food sector will face a number of challenges over the coming decades linked to population growth, water scarcity, and climate change. They call for improvements in the industry’s skills and expertise, and for a richer talent pipeline into the sector.

The Task Force commissioned CFE Research to provide survey evidence to enhance its understanding of attitudes towards careers in the agriculture and food sector and the influences that can encourage, or deter, talented individuals from joining it, including those not from a background in the area. The research adds to existing, predominantly qualitative, evidence by surveying current undergraduates as well as those who have recently begun working in the agriculture and food sector.

The agriculture and the food sector are a vital part of the UK economy, and the UK has traditionally been a leader in agricultural production. But the sector as a whole now faces a number of challenges. Shortages of land, water, and energy, alongside continuing population growth, may test the capacity of the sector to provide the products demanded by consumers, and will call for increased scientific and technological innovation.

These pressures mean that the food economy needs a highly qualified workforce. But skills shortages are already widespread across the industry, particularly at higher levels. This gap must be closed if the UK is to increase its competitiveness and raise its agricultural productivity growth. So it is important to understand what influences people with higher level skills to work or not work in the sector, and gain insights into their perceptions of the food economy as a career option.
Method

The key research questions we wanted to answer included:

- How is the agriculture and food sector perceived by undergraduates and recent entrants to the sector?
- How attractive is the sector to potential new entrants?
- What influences people to want to work in the sector?

In order to answer these questions, we conducted two online surveys during September 2014. They were:

- A survey of 500 undergraduates, of whom 253 had recently completed their first year and 247 had recently completed their second year of studies. They were studying a range of subjects and were located across the UK. The survey was conducted through a panel survey provider.

- A survey of 154 recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector. They included recent graduates working in the sector and others who had joined recently after working in some other sector. The survey was distributed to known agriculture and food employer contacts by NCUB.

Both surveys covered key details about the respondents, their awareness and perceptions of the agriculture and food sector, future career plans, and influences that might affect how attractive they see the sector as being.

For this report, the survey data was thoroughly cleaned and checked prior to undergoing descriptive and inferential analysis. Survey findings have been tested for statistical significance to ensure that any differences between groups of respondents are genuine, robust, and can reasonably be considered to accurately reflect the population from which they were drawn. Open-response questions have been coded to quantify the key themes emerging from the responses.

This report

This final report presents the quantitative and qualitative findings from the undergraduate and recent entrant surveys. Following this introduction, section 2 begins by describing the sample characteristics of the survey respondents and section 3 outlines the findings from our survey respondents regarding their awareness and perceptions of the agriculture and food sector as an employer.

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1 Inferential tests used to calculate whether findings were statistically significant were the Chi-Square test and ANOVA test.
02. Sample Characteristics

This section describes the sample characteristics of the respondents to the online surveys undertaken with undergraduates and recent entrants to the agriculture and food industry.

Who we surveyed

We conducted online surveys with 500 undergraduates and 154 recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector. We describe below the characteristics of the survey respondents, including the sub-sectors and occupations of recent entrants, the length of time they have spent in the sector, whether they worked in other sectors previously and why they decided to leave, their qualifications, and their demographics. We also explore the subjects studied by the undergraduates, in addition to their demographics.

Recent entrants to the sector

Sub-sectors

Recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector were asked which sub-sectors their employers operated in. Figure 1 highlights that just under half (48.1%) of the respondents reported that their employers are in food and drink manufacturing and processing; followed by a further quarter (26.0%) operating in food and drink marketing, promoting, and selling; and more than a fifth (22.7%) working in primary food production. Less than a sixth (14.9%) of respondents reported that their employer operated within food and drink wholesale, and a fifth (21.4%) reported that their employer worked in other sub-sectors, of which the most common responses included research and trade associations. Some businesses are active in more than one sector, so the responses add up to more than 100%.

Occupations

Respondents were then asked to highlight the occupational category of their current role. Figure 2 outlines that just under a third (32.0%) of respondents fell within the professional occupational category and a further quarter (24.2%) were associate professionals. Respondents were also asked to provide their job titles. These spanned a wide range of roles including Agronomist, Graduate Trainee, National Account Executive, Project Engineer, Researcher, and Supply Planner.

Further analysis was conducted of the respondents’ occupational categories (professionals; associate professionals and technical roles; managers and senior officials) in a range of sub-sectors within the industry. Figure 3 outlines the differences between sub-sectors. Whilst caution should be taken due to the small base size for some of the sub-sectors, it is notable that for the most part, each sub-sector has more respondents who are professionals than associate professionals, and more associate professionals than managers and senior officials. The only sub-sectors where this is not the case are food and drink wholesale, where there is a higher proportion of managers and senior officials (30.4%) than associate professionals (17.4%); and food and drink hospitality where there is a higher proportion of managers and senior officials (37.5%) than associate professionals (12.5%) and professionals (25.0%).
**Figure 1:** The sub-sectors of recent entrants to the sector work in \( (n=154) \)

- **Food and drink manufacturing and processing e.g. processing raw produce to create food and drink products for the wholesale or retail industry, packaging, supply chain logistics, and distributing food and drink**
  - 48.1%

- **Food and drink marketing, promoting, and selling e.g. selling and marketing food and drink products to the general public**
  - 26.0%

- **Primary food production e.g. agriculture, field scale, horticulture, or livestock farming**
  - 22.7%

- **Food and drink wholesale e.g. selling food and drink products to businesses**
  - 14.9%

- **Food and drink hospitality e.g. hotel, restaurant, pub, and catering trades**
  - 5.2%

- **Other**
  - 21.4%

**Figure 2:** Occupations of recent entrants to the sector \( (n=153) \)

- **Professionals e.g. Botanist, Food Scientist, Pharmacist, Researcher**
  - 32%

- **Associate professionals & technical roles e.g. Livestock Technician, Food Technologist, Buyer**
  - 24.2%

- **Managers and senior officials e.g. Farm Manager, Production Manager, Store Manager, Restaurant Manager**
  - 15.7%

- **Sales and customer service staff e.g. Garden Centre Manager, Sales Assistant**
  - 7.2%

- **Administrative/ Clerical e.g. Farm Secretary, Finance Officer, Stock Controller, Security Guard**
  - 5.2%

- **Skilled trades e.g. Fish Farm Worker, Butcher, Baker, Chef**
  - 1.3%

- **Process, plant and machine operatives e.g. Machinery Operator, Fork Lift Truck Driver, Bakery Assistant**
  - 0.7%

- **Other**
  - 13.7%
**Figure 3:** Proportion of occupations in sub-sectors (bases variable)

- **Primary food production (n=34)**
  - Professionals: 35.3%
  - Associate Professionals & Technical Roles: 29.4%
  - Managers and senior officials: 20.6%

- **Food and drink manufacturing and processing (n=73)**
  - Professionals: 29.7%
  - Associate Professionals & Technical Roles: 25.7%
  - Managers and senior officials: 18.9%

- **Food and drink wholesale (n=23)**
  - Professionals: 30.4%
  - Associate Professionals & Technical Roles: 17.4%
  - Managers and senior officials: 30.4%

- **Food and drink marketing, promoting and selling (n=40)**
  - Professionals: 27.5%
  - Associate Professionals & Technical Roles: 25.0%
  - Managers and senior officials: 17.5%

- **Food and drink hospitality (n=8)**
  - Professionals: 25.0%
  - Associate Professionals & Technical Roles: 12.5%
  - Managers and senior officials: 37.5%

**Length of time in the sector**

Recent entrants were asked to indicate when they began working in the agriculture and food sector. Figure 4 shows that nearly two thirds (64.3%) of respondents have been working within the sector for less than three years.
Prior experience in other sectors

Over a third (35.7%) of survey respondents reported that they had worked in another industry before entering the agriculture and food sector. Respondents reported previously working in a range of sectors including finance, education, health and beauty, and IT.

As might be expected, a respondent’s age significantly affects whether they have previously worked in another sector. The majority (80.0%) of those aged 30 or above reported doing so, whilst just over a quarter (27.8%) of those aged between 25 and 29 did so, and under a fifth (19.2%) of those aged up to 24.

Reasons for leaving previous sectors and joining the agriculture and food sector

Recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector gave a range of professional and other reasons for leaving their previous sector. Just under a quarter of respondents (22.9%) indicated that they left their previous sector for a better opportunity in agriculture and food, and this was the most common of responses. The responses gathered by our survey were very brief, and noted most commonly that the opportunity had “just come up”, with the implication of better prospects or career development. Several respondents simply indicated that it was a “better job opportunity”, or a chance to “climb the ladder”. A small number explained that they moved sector due to being dissatisfied with their previous role. One noted that they moved sector because they “wanted to stop sitting in front of a computer all day”, while another felt that their job now had a greater purpose in the agriculture and food sector:

"Because the role of an environmental consultant involves little contact with the environment and is very much business and money orientated ... whereas in food security you’re trying to increase/stabilise yields for the benefit of the population."
Personal interest was also cited as a key reason by some respondents (14.6%). Three survey respondents noted that they moved to the sector to follow their personal career aspirations:

"Because I realised that my passion is to work with research and innovation."

"I have always wanted a career in FMCG and felt that it was the perfect opportunity to do so."

"I love plants and scientific research so I decided to combine my interests do a PhD in horticulture."

Over a ninth (12.5%) of survey respondents indicated that their key reason for leaving their previous sector was difficulty in securing employment. A few respondents explained that their career change to agriculture and food was necessitated by redundancy or challenging market forces in their previous profession. Linked to this, a sixth of respondents (14.6%) indicated that they moved to the sector to enable career progression, with a small number of respondents suggesting that the agriculture and food sector was better suited to their qualifications or skills. One respondent noted that they had moved into a “better opportunity to utilise an engineering degree or skill set”.

**Qualifications studied**

As outlined in Figure 5, nearly three quarters (73.4%) of recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector whom we surveyed have a Bachelor’s degree, whilst over a quarter (27.9%) have a Master’s degree. Respondents listed all the qualifications they hold, for example both a bachelor’s degree and a PhD, so the totals add up to over 100%.

**Figure 5: Recent entrants’ qualifications (n=154)**

- Bachelor’s degree e.g. BA or BSc: 73.4%
- Master’s degree e.g. MA or MSc: 27.9%
- Doctorate e.g. PhD: 7.1%
- I do not have any qualifications: 1.9%
- Other qualifications: 14.9%
Recent entrants to the sector were asked to indicate when they completed their Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctorate degrees, and what subjects they studied.

**Bachelor’s degrees**

Figure 6 indicates that nearly two thirds (64.4%) of respondents had completed their Bachelor’s degree in 2010 or more recently.

**Figure 6: When recent entrants completed their Bachelor’s degree (n=112)**
Figure 7 highlights the principal subjects studied at bachelor’s level and indicates that recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector have studied a broad range of subjects at bachelor’s level. Aside from combined degrees, which were studied by just under a fifth (18.3%) of respondents, the most common subjects studied were Management Studies (9.2%), Nutrition (8.3%), Biology (6.4%) and Agriculture (6.4%).

**Figure 7:** Bachelor’s degrees studied by recent entrants coded at the principal subject level (n=109)
Master’s degrees

Figure 8 indicates that nearly three quarters (74.5%) of respondents with master’s degrees had completed them in 2010 or more recently.

**Figure 8:** When recent entrants completed their Master’s degrees (n=43)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 or earlier</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9 outlines the range of subjects studied at master's level by recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector at principal subject level. The most common subject area studied was Chemical process and energy engineering (14.6%), followed by Management Studies (12.2%), Marketing (9.8%), and Agriculture (9.8%).

**Figure 9:** Master's degrees studied by recent entrants coded at the principal subject level (n=41)

- **Chemical process & energy engineering:** 14.6%
- **Management Studies:** 12.2%
- **Marketing:** 9.8%
- **Agriculture:** 9.8%
- **Combined:** 4.9%
- **Mechanical engineering:** 4.9%
- **African studies:** 2.4%
- **Anthropology:** 2.4%
- **Social policy:** 2.4%
- **Politics:** 2.4%
- **Economics:** 2.4%
- **Planning (urban, rural & regional):** 2.4%
- **Biotechnology:** 2.4%
- **Health informatics:** 2.4%
- **Electronic & electrical engineering:** 2.4%
- **General engineering:** 2.4%
- **Mathematics:** 2.4%
- **Geology:** 2.4%
- **Agricultural Sciences:** 2.4%
- **Food & beverage studies:** 2.4%
- **Others in Biological Sciences:** 2.4%
- **Psychology:** 2.4%
- **Biology:** 2.4%
- **Nutrition:** 2.4%

**Doctorates**

Of the 11 respondents who had a PhD, 8 had completed it since 2010. The subjects studied by these individuals were closely related to the agriculture and food sector and included Biotechnology, Agriculture, Microbiology, Genetics, Botany, and Nutrition.

**Undergraduates**

Of the undergraduate respondents, 253 (50.6%) had recently completed their first year of study and 247 (49.4%) had recently completed their second year of study. Statistical analysis showed no significant differences in the responses from these two cohorts.
Subjects of study

Our approach to sampling undergraduates ensured their subject of study aligned to a principal subject code that could be related to the agriculture and food sector. Figure 10 details the breakdown of these subjects. It highlights the point that just over a tenth (10.2%) of respondents each study Mathematics, and Other subjects in Biological Sciences, those not categorised elsewhere in the list. Just under a tenth study each of Biology (8.4%) and Chemistry (8.2%).

Figure 10: Bachelor’s degrees studied by undergraduates at the principal subject level (n=500)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Others in Biological Sciences</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molecular biology, biophysics &amp; biochemistry</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical geographical sciences</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical engineering</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Studies</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in Physical Sciences</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoology</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human &amp; social geography</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical process &amp; energy engineering</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in engineering</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in business &amp; administrative studies</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-clinical veterinary medicine</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in veterinary medicine and dentistry</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical veterinary medicine and dentistry</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetics</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in subjects allied to medicine</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others in medicine and dentistry</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials Science</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the undergraduate sample was not stratified, the proportion of undergraduate respondents from each of the principal subject areas is not necessarily representative of the undergraduate population overall. The data presented in Figure 10 highlights the proportion of survey respondents who are studying subjects within principal subject areas that broadly align to the agriculture and food sector.
Demographics

Gender

Figure 11 highlights that the undergraduate and recent entrant surveys received responses from a similar proportion of males (31.6% and 32.6%, respectively) and females (68.4% and 65.4%, respectively).

Figure 11: Gender of survey respondents (variable bases)

![Gender distribution chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Recent Entrant (n=136)</th>
<th>Undergraduate (n=500)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age

Analysis of survey respondents’ age shows the mean age of undergraduate respondents was 20.6 years and the mean age of recent entrants was 27.9 years. Figure 12 and Figure 13 below outline the breakdown of respondents’ ages.

Given that the undergraduate survey was disseminated to those who had completed their first and second year of university, it is not surprising that over three quarters (77.2%) of respondents are under 21 years old (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Age of undergraduates survey respondents (n=500)

![Age distribution chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 19</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 and above</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13 highlights that nearly two fifths (38.2%) of respondents to the recent-entrant survey were under 25 years old; a further two fifths (39.7%) were between the ages of 25 and 29; whilst over a fifth (22.1%) were aged 30 and above.

**Figure 13: Ages of recent-entrant survey respondents (n=136)**

- Up to 24: 38.2%
- 25-29: 39.7%
- 30 and above: 22.1%

**Ethnicity**

Figure 14 shows the ethnicity of respondents to both the undergraduate and recent-entrant surveys. The majority of respondents to both were White British (69.0% and 75.9%, respectively).

**Figure 14: Ethnicity of survey respondents (variable bases)**

- White British
  - Undergraduate: 69.0%
  - Recent entrant: 75.9%
- White other
  - Undergraduate: 8.0%
  - Recent entrant: 13.1%
- Asian or British Asian
  - Undergraduate: 10.4%
  - Recent entrant: 3.6%
- Mixed
  - Undergraduate: 3.0%
  - Recent entrant: 2.9%
- Chinese
  - Undergraduate: 3.4%
  - Recent entrant: 0.7%
- Black or British Black
  - Undergraduate: 3.2%
  - Recent entrant: 0.7%
- Do not wish to say
  - Undergraduate: 2.2%
  - Recent entrant: 2.2%
- Other
  - Undergraduate: 0.8%
  - Recent entrant: 0.7%

**Disability**

Respondents to both the undergraduate and recent-entrant survey were asked whether they considered themselves to have a disability, health condition, or specific learning disability. A minority of survey respondents to the undergraduate (4.8%) and the recent-entrant survey (2.9%) reported that they did.
03. Detailed Findings

This section describes the findings from the online surveys undertaken with undergraduates and with recent entrants to the agriculture and food sector.

This section of the report summarises the findings of our online surveys undertaken with 500 undergraduates and 154 recent entrants into the agriculture and food sector. Drawing on descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, it provides detailed analysis of the quantitative findings from the two surveys and is illustrated by key qualitative findings from the open response questions within the surveys.

The undergraduate responses are not broken down by year of study as the analysis was not statistically significant.

Awareness and perceptions of the sector

Awareness of career possibilities

Undergraduates were asked to say whether they agreed they have a good awareness of career possibilities in the agriculture and food sector. They were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. This scoring system applies to all responses in this section unless indicated otherwise.

On average, respondents provided a score of 3.2, indicating that they do not think they have such awareness. They were also asked the extent to which they thought that young people in general have a good awareness of career possibilities in the agriculture and food sector, to which they reported an average score of 2.9.

Interestingly, recent entrants to the sector gave similar or even lower scores for their perceptions of young people’s awareness of career possibilities in the sector, providing a mean score of 2.5 (Figure 15).

Furthermore, statistical analysis shows that recent entrants to the sector provide significantly lower scores than undergraduates to this question. People in the industry think that young people have a lower awareness of career possibilities in the sector than undergraduates believe they do.

Figure 15: Undergraduates’ and recent entrants’ perceptions of young people’s awareness of career possibilities in the sector (variable bases)
Undergraduates were asked which graduate occupations they were aware of within the agriculture and food sector. As outlined in Figure 16, the majority were aware of sales and customer service staff (80.0%), managers and senior officials (74.8%), and professional occupations (73.8%), but only a third (33.2%) were aware of associate professional occupations.

**Figure 16: Occupations within the sector of which undergraduates were aware (n=500)**

- Sales and customer service staff e.g. Garden Centre Manager, Sales Assistant: 80.0%
- Managers and senior officials e.g. Farm Manager, Production Manager, Store Manager, Restaurant Manager: 74.8%
- Professionals e.g. Botanist, Food Scientist, Pharmacist, Researcher: 73.8%
- Associate professionals & technical roles e.g. Livestock Technician, Food Technologist, Buyer: 33.2%
- None of the above: 4.0%

Perceived attractiveness of the sector

Both undergraduates and recent entrants to the sector were asked to what extent they agreed that the agriculture and food sector was attractive to new graduates. Given the perceived lack of awareness of the sector, it is perhaps not surprising that neither undergraduates (3.3) nor recent entrants (3.9) rate the agriculture and food sector as an attractive one for new graduates (Figure 17). Recent entrants provide significantly higher scores than undergraduates, although even these are still not high by absolute standards.

**Figure 17: Undergraduates’ and recent entrants’ perception of the attractiveness of the sector (variable bases)**

- Recent entrant (n=150): 3.9
- Undergraduate (n=500): 3.3
**Why the sector is attractive**

Undergraduates \((n_u=68)\) and recent entrants \((n_re=39)\) who agreed the sector was attractive to new graduates were asked to explain why they thought this was the case, and respondents offered a variety of reasons. The most commonly reported key reasons provided by undergraduates and recent entrants are outlined in Figure 18.

The food sector's size and diversity leads to offering many job opportunities with a broad variety, and this strongly influences undergraduates \((27.9\%)\) and recent entrants to the sector \((64.1\%)\). The view from both sets of survey respondents is consistent, with many respondents citing the number of different employment possibilities, career options, and flexibility of choice as key attracting factors. Flexibility of choice is particularly important from the undergraduate perspective:

"Lots of career options; it can be taken in numerous directions. Flexibility is useful as the job market changes and technology advances, or for people who have no firm plans for which direction they wish to pursue."

Recent entrants to the sector commonly cited the number of opportunities available and the range of options open to them as professionals in the agriculture and food sector. Some recent entrants indicated that the good availability of opportunities for graduates was a driving factor. One respondent noted "It's such a massive industry and there are so many different opportunities for graduates", while another stated "Lots of graduate schemes with training opportunities that are widely advertised". One respondent noted:

"Many businesses from SMEs to large multinationals offer a wide range of opportunities, so it is likely graduates can find a career that matches their skills and interests as well as their ideas of progression."

Both undergraduate survey respondents \((38.2\%)\) and recent entrants to the sector \((25.6\%)\) recognised that the agriculture and food sector was a promising one in which to work, due to strong demand for its products and services. This makes opportunities plentiful and improves job security.

Undergraduates commonly cited the many possibilities open to them as a key reason to consider the food economy as an employer. Many pointed to the "promising" nature of the sector due to its importance to the UK economy. We received many responses like this one:

"There is a large demand for expansion in farming and industrial farming and making producing resources more efficient. As a country we need to become more self sufficient and for this reason the future looks good in the industry."

"It's something people are always going to need and there are lots of opportunities to specialise."

"Because it has many career options available and is a sector that is constantly in demand."

Similarly, recent entrants to the sector emphasised the growth and increasing importance of the food economy as key reasons for joining. One respondent perceived that replacement demand, brought on by an ageing workforce, was a key driver of opportunities there:

"The agriculture sector is filled with mainly an ageing workforce so there are advancement opportunities if people are prepared to work for it. The food sector is also becoming more crucial as the general public become more aware of the benefits of ‘buying British’."
What could help make the sector more attractive?

Undergraduates (n=281) and recent entrants (nre=43) who disagreed that the sector was attractive to new graduates were asked how they thought it could be made more attractive, and they gave a range of suggestions, which are presented in Figure 19. For undergraduates, the most common suggestion was to improve advertising and marketing of the sector (46.6%). They commonly highlighted the need for more awareness of the sector overall, and many said that careers and opportunities in the sector need to be advertised more frequently. Some responses suggest that very little is known about the sector amongst students. When asked how the sector could be made more attractive, one undergraduate student noted:

"More advertising - I've barely heard/seen anything to do with it until now! If it is presented as an actual option for a full career, people will be interested."

A number of undergraduates recognised that better visibility was central to debunking “traditional stereotypes about the sector”, which is more expansive than “just farming”:

"Advertising that it does not contain only manual work positions, but also highly professional positions."

"Making it ‘cool’ in the media. I personally think that a food technician is a ‘cool’ job but farm manager is very dull."

This view was echoed by recent entrants (30.2%) to the sector, who identified a poor perception of the sector amongst students. They highlighted the need to provide more information and to “break down the stereotype that the sector is low skilled and poorly paid”. One recent entrant felt that it was important to challenge these perceptions during school education, to “remove the stigma placed upon it right from the
earliest level of education that it is purely for underachievers”. Another respondent noted a lack of promotion of the sector during school and higher education:

"By raising awareness of the different job roles and opportunities. When I was studying for A-levels, the specific roles were not explained or advertised to me. Equally, when I was at university, these roles were not promoted until I started on a graduate scheme where I learned the different roles, experiences and sectors of a food business."

Both undergraduates (42.3%) and recent entrants (34.9%) highlighted the need for more information about possible roles and career paths in food and agriculture. Qualitative data collected through our surveys suggests that the key to improving perceptions of the industry is to place more emphasis upon the professionalism of the jobs, the potential for career progression, and the pay and rewards of agriculture and food. Several undergraduates noted that more specific information, advice, and guidance about careers in the sector are needed, particularly to overturn negative perceptions:

"First of all, increase the awareness in the different jobs there are, because mostly we have no clue on the different jobs available. Usually when we think of agriculture we think of working in a farm from dawn until dusk, getting paid very badly."

"More emphasis on the professionalism of the jobs, and the pay. Students general perception is currently that agriculture is long hours at minimum wage."

This view dovetails with responses from recent entrants to the sector that more and better information is the key device to improve perceptions:

"Agriculture (Farming) is often perceived as a somewhat backward trade. However the agricultural sector employs the latest scientific developments and techniques (Precision Farming). Showing young graduates (and school children) how interesting and technically challenging Agriculture is could inspire more of them to pick a career in this sector."

Recent entrants added that in order to be more attractive, the agriculture and food sector would need to provide higher salaries or other financial benefits (27.9%). There was also recognition from several respondents that other industries provide better wages, higher starting salaries, and better overall working conditions, which leads graduates to look elsewhere than food when they consider possible careers:

"I think graduates need to know the range of opportunities that there are in Agriculture, for example I had never heard of pea breeding before but that's what I now do and from a graduate perspective it is very interesting. There also needs to be more incentive, graduates in Business-centred Degrees can expect to go into high paid jobs, but you can't if you go into this sector."

"The money does not reflect either the skill or the hours required, e.g. to work as a chef, or competent front of house. How many other sectors would think £20,000 a year was good money for 6 day, 60 hour weeks as many sous chefs do?"

While better wages were mentioned by only 11.0% of undergraduates, our recent-entrant survey responses align with this view and suggest that more incentives are needed to attract graduates to the sector. Undergraduates gave a range of suggestions, including higher starting salaries and better rewards and perks for entering the sector, and clearer progression routes once on graduate programmes.
What would help more young people pursue a career in the sector?

In addition to asking survey respondents how the sector could be made more attractive to new graduates, we also asked undergraduates ($n=493$) and recent entrants ($n=117$) to explain what they thought would help draw more young people to a career there. Their ideas overlapped with the suggestions outlined above to improve the attractiveness of the sector, and are outlined in Figure 20. Both undergraduates and recent entrants felt that the primary mechanism to enable more young people to enter the sector was to provide more information about the wide range of careers and opportunities that it contains, and the scope for progression in the sector (50.7% and 49.6% for undergraduates and recent entrants, respectively). Linked to this, both undergraduates and recent entrants felt that better advertising and marketing of potential opportunities and careers would help (22.3% and 17.9% for undergraduates and recent entrants, respectively).

A small but notable proportion of undergraduates indicated that higher salaries would encourage people to enter the sector (10.8%). A similar minority of recent entrants (8 respondents, 6.8%), shared this view. Just over a quarter of recent entrants also suggested either greater engagement between employers in the sector and schools (17.9%), or greater engagement with universities and students (7.7%). For those suggesting greater engagement with schools, emphasis was placed upon raising awareness of the size, importance, and nature of the sector at a younger age, potentially before decisions are made about choosing A-levels. Some
undergraduates suggested that a greater level of engagement between employers and schools, or between universities and students, would help more young people to pursue a career in the sector (1.8% and 7.7%, respectively).

**Figure 20:** Key suggestions from undergraduates and recent entrants to help more young people to pursue a career in the sector (variable bases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Undergraduate (n=493)</th>
<th>Recent Entrant (n=117)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More information about careers in the sector</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better advertising/marketing of the sector</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher wages</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More engagement between employers and universities</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More engagement between employers and schools</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceived importance of the sector**

As we have seen, undergraduates and recent entrants to the sector think that young people have a poor awareness of the career possibilities in the food economy, and do not think it is attractive to new graduates. But they strongly agreed that it was important to the UK (5.7 and 6.3 out of 7, respectively). Statistical analysis shows that recent entrants provide significantly higher scores to this question than undergraduates.
Is the sector a good career option?

Further to this, both undergraduates and recent entrants to the sector were asked how far they agreed that the agriculture and food sector is a good career option. Following on from undergraduates’ lack of awareness of the sector and their perception of it as unattractive, it is not surprising that they were somewhat indifferent to this idea, providing a mean score of 4.3. However, recent entrants to the sector were much more positive and provided a significantly higher score of 5.7, indicating that they agree that the sector is a good career option (Figure 21). It is also important to note that only nine recent graduates provided a score of 1-3 to indicate that they did not agree that the sector is a good career option. These respondents worked in a variety of sub-sectors and held a variety of occupations.

Figure 21: Undergraduates’ and recent entrants’ perceptions of whether the sector is a good career option (variable bases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recent entrant (n=150)</th>
<th>Undergraduate (n=500)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is the sector a good career option?

Building on their views of why the sector is attractive, undergraduates (nu=202) and recent entrants (nre=86) were asked why they agree that the agriculture and food sector is a good career option. As above, the responses were similar in content to those given in previous questions, and the views of undergraduates and recent entrants are similar. The largest proportion of respondents from both surveys noted that strong, ongoing demand, and therefore good job security, was a key reason why the sector was a good career option. Almost two thirds (61.9%) of undergraduates and two fifths (40.7%) of graduates felt that this was the case. Around a quarter of both undergraduates (27.7%) and recent entrants (24.4%) felt that the number and diversity of opportunities available was an important factor. A significant minority (18.6%) of recent entrants also felt that working in the sector was rewarding, for example through good career progression and opportunities for development.

How could the sector be improved to make it a good career option?

When asked how the agriculture and food sector could be improved to make it a good career option, undergraduates (104) produced a range of suggestions and comments that strongly reflect responses to previous questions. Almost a quarter (23.1%) felt that increasing the profile and awareness of the sector would make it seem a better career option to students. A similar proportion (19.2%) felt that more information about the possible roles and careers available would make the agriculture and food sector a better option for prospective students. This again suggests that addressing low awareness about the sector in higher education may be enough to attract additional entrants to the sector. However, almost a fifth (17.3%) of undergraduate respondents stated that higher wages would improve the agriculture and
food sector’s standing as a career option and 14.4 per cent felt that it would need to offer more or better opportunities, particularly for graduates, in order to be considered a good career option.

**Recent entrants’ experience of working in the sector**

Although recent entrants to the sector report low levels of awareness and attractiveness for food and agriculture amongst young people, they are far more positive about their own experience of working there. They were asked to what extent they agreed with a range of statements regarding their satisfaction with their career, whether the sector is a good career option (as previously outlined), and whether they would recommend it to new graduates. As Figure 22 shows, they agree with all of these statements.

**Figure 22: Recent entrants’ experience of working in the sector (bases variable)**

- I am satisfied with my career in the agriculture and food sector (n=149) 5.5
- The agriculture and food sector is a good career option (n=150) 5.7
- I would recommend working in the agriculture and food sector to new graduates (n=150) 5.7

**Recent entrants’ reasons for recommendation of the sector**

Recent entrants to the sector who agreed that they would recommend working in the sector to recent entrants (nre=92) gave a number of reasons why they would do so. These align closely with the overall reasons why they deem the sector to be attractive.

The most frequent reasons for recommending the sector were the number and variety of opportunities (34.8%), and the strong demand and growth potential of the sector (32.6%). Several respondents indicated that the sector was rapidly growing in importance to the economy, that its rapid rate of innovation and technological change would help to drive varied opportunities for employment and progression, and that these factors would increase job security. One respondent noted:

"Agriculture and food are thriving, undergoing necessary shifts to adapt to the current climate (economic, cultural, ecological), it is an exciting place to be, with lots of career opportunities and the possibility to grow."
Several respondents suggested that the economic importance and social purpose of the sector make working there feel relevant and rewarding, bringing high job satisfaction:

"The agricultural sector has a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of the UK (sometimes even world) population. Agriculture also faces its greatest challenge with a rising world population, water and (fertile) land scarcity and a changing climate. Thus, working in the agricultural sector is both altruistic and also intellectually challenging."

"It is highly important not just to the economy but to being able to survive as a nation that we have a strong agricultural sector. We can live without banks or e-marketing, but not without food to eat."

Recent entrants were also likely to recommend working in agriculture and food on the basis of robust career progression and skills development (27.2%). The challenging and varied nature of day-to-day roles in the sector was cited as highly positive for personal and professional development. Several respondents noted the numerous opportunities available for career development, and the ability to gain transferable skills that may also be used in other sectors:

"The individual development is good, there are opportunities to move around and learn new skills and gain new experiences. It is fast paced, challenging and overall a significant sector to be in."

"It’s a good start after University, any skills you learn in this sector can be adapted elsewhere if you chose not to stay within this sector."

Beyond career development, many respondents felt they would recommend the agriculture and food sector simply because working in the sector is interesting and enjoyable (26.1%). In particular respondents said that working in the sector was “fast-paced”, “challenging”, “engaging”, and “varied”:

"Interesting and fast paced industry where no two days are the same. Having products influenced by external conditions (e.g. weather) ensures no two days are the same with constant challenges to solve."

"Because it’s a fascinating area, where you have many choices to work according to the abilities and interest, e.g. food processing operations, sensory evaluation, food safety, quality assurance, etc."

**Future plans**

**Undergraduates’ career plans**

Undergraduates were asked about the extent to which they had a set career in mind for when they leave university. As outlined in Figure 23, under a fifth (17.8%) of respondents have a clear career plan in mind, but over a third (35.6%) know the broad career area they would like to pursue. Of these individuals, only four specifically reported that they planned to work in the agriculture and food industry.
Further to this, undergraduates were asked to what extent they agreed that they planned to work in the agriculture and food sector prior to undertaking higher education. Analysis of this data indicates that undergraduates did not plan to work in the sector before going to university, providing a mean score of only 1.8. However, they were also asked to what extent they agreed that they would consider working in the agriculture and food sector when they leave university. On average, respondents provided a score of 3.4, to this question, suggesting that on the whole they would not consider working in the agriculture and food sector upon leaving university, but are now more likely to consider the idea than before they embarked on higher education.

Recent entrants to the sector were also asked to what extent they agreed that they had planned to work in the agriculture and food sector prior to undertaking higher education. Surprisingly, they provided a mean score of 3.0, which suggests that they also did not plan to work in the sector prior to undertaking higher education, although this score is significantly higher than that provided by undergraduates.

**Why are undergraduates not considering agriculture and food as a career option?**

The 251 undergraduates who disagreed that they would consider a career in the agriculture and food sector upon leaving higher education gave a few key reasons. Most often, those not considering working in the sector simply already had another career in mind elsewhere (42.2%). Many respondents suggested that they had a particular affinity with another subject, accounting or healthcare for example. For these respondents,
the rationale often related to long-standing aspirations, where decisions to work in a particular sector were made at a much earlier point in life. We received numerous comments to this effect:

"Because I have no desire to do so. I have always been clear in my mind of what I want to do and I would like to teach."

"Because I have already made my mind up about which career path to embark upon."

"I had already decided on my career plan a long time ago, before GCSE."

Many undergraduates indicated that they were uninterested in working in the sector (27.5%), with many stating for example “it doesn't appeal to me.” Some respondents offered more insight into their reasons for this attitude, which typically centred on a poor overall perception of the sector, or the expectation that salaries would be too low. Several undergraduates felt that they were likely to find better opportunities in other sectors after graduation, with one respondent stating, for example “I don’t think it would pay very well compared to other jobs I could get with my degree”. Others felt that their earning potential would be constrained:

"It does not appeal to me. I would not expect to receive a high paid or rewarding job in that field. I would want a job that can deliver a high standard of living."

"I do not see it as profitable enough in terms of salary."

"Does not really interest me… not sure there are enough well paid jobs for graduates."

Another common issue is the extent to which undergraduates see a career in the food economy as aligning with their degree subject. There seems to be a view, reported by 17.5 per cent of the sample, that it would not. Several respondents felt that their degree was not relevant to the sector, and several indicated that their preference would be to work in a sector more closely related to their studies. One respondent explained:

"I have attended university to study music technology and I hope to use the knowledge I gain from this in my future career otherwise it would be pointless to continue studying for this degree."

Finally, several responses gathered through the undergraduate survey suggest that students do not see a clear pathway into the agriculture and food sector from higher education. This was relevant even for research or science-related subjects, suggesting that more emphasis may need to be placed upon the transferable skills these subjects may provide for a career in the sector. One respondent stated that they were “not studying a subject that will lead me into the sector or provide me with the qualifications required”.

**Sub-sectors undergraduates would consider working in**

Undergraduates who agreed that they would consider working in the agriculture and food sector were asked which sub-sectors they would consider working in. As outlined in Figure 24, undergraduates most commonly reported that they would consider working in food and drink manufacturing and processing (46.2%) and food and drink marketing, promoting, and selling (44.8%). Fewer undergraduates reported that they would consider working in primary food production (28.0%), and food and drink hospitality (28.0%). Of those who selected “other”, responses included research and food science.
Figure 24: Sub-sectors undergraduates would consider working in (n=143)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-sector</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink manufacturing and processing, e.g. processing raw produce to create food and drink products for the wholesale or retail industry, packaging, supply chain logistics and distributing food and drink</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink marketing, promoting, and selling, e.g. selling and marketing food and drink products to the general public</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink wholesale, e.g. selling food and drink products to businesses</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink hospitality, e.g. hotel, restaurant, pub and catering trades</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary food production, e.g. agriculture, field scale, horticulture or livestock farming</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons why undergraduates would not consider working in specific sub-sectors

Our undergraduate survey asked respondents, where relevant, why they would not consider working in specific agriculture and food sub-sectors. Respondents provided a range of reasons, the vast majority of which fell into the four distinct categories outlined in Figure 25. The primary reason for not considering entering most sub-sectors was lack of interest, particularly in food and drink marketing, promoting, and sales (42.3%), and food and drink manufacturing and processing (40%). Across the board, respondents normally evoked this in a fairly straightforward way, for example by simply stating “I’m not interested in this area” or “this does not appeal to me”. In the case of food and drink marketing, promoting, and selling, a key issue for a number of respondents was a lack of interest in working in sales or marketing in general, with one respondent typically stating, for example, “I’m not interested in being a salesperson”.

A relatively large proportion of respondents also indicated that they would not consider working in each sub-sector because it was not relevant to their current studies, skills or wider experience. Over a third (35.4%) of respondents who would not consider working in primary food production said this. While some respondents stated that they did not have the necessary skills or subject expertise for primary food production, most felt that this particular sub-sector was poorly aligned with their current degree course.

"My degree is not tailored to these particular areas of work."

"I don’t feel my degree would give me the required qualifications."

"Because I would be considered ‘over-qualified’ for such professions, and therefore, would not find employment. They offer little progression for someone with a degree."

"I am studying chemistry, unlikely this would be much use in farming."
Respondents felt that an overall lack of ability or skills as a salesperson was the main reason for avoiding careers in food and drink wholesaling, rather than any lack of alignment with their academic studies. For example, three respondents noted:

"Not a salesperson, do not have those natural skills or inclination towards it."

"Haven't the right personality for a sales person."

"I wouldn't be a good sales person!"

Analysis of the qualitative data collected suggests that respondents sometimes held a poor perception of jobs or conditions in each sub-sector, and particularly within primary food production (21.2%) and food and drink hospitality (17.2%). As we saw above, these are the sub-sectors that undergraduates were least likely to consider working in. Comments from undergraduates revealed a general perception of labour-intensive work, low pay and poor working conditions in both. In the case of primary food production, several respondents indicated it was too physically demanding, “too hands on” or “too labour intensive”. We received similar comments for the food and drink hospitality sector. A notable minority of respondents indicated that their poor perception stemmed from previous bad previous experiences of working in the sector. For example, three respondents stated:

"I have had bad experience working in this area in the past."

"I've worked as a waitress before and didn't enjoy it."

"I've worked in these trades before and found the working hours to be unsociable."

Figure 25: Reasons why undergraduates would not consider sub-sectors of the agriculture and food sector (variable bases)
**Occupations undergraduates aspire to**

Undergraduates who agreed that they would consider working in the agriculture and food sector were asked to consider which occupational category best described their ultimate career goal within it. Figure 26 shows that over half (51.0%) reported that they aspire to becoming a professional in the sector.

Figure 26: Career aspirations of undergraduates considering working in the sector (n=143)

**Recent entrants’ career plans**

The majority of recent entrants (93.6%) stated that they planned to continue with their career in the agriculture and food sector. The few (6.4%) who did not explained that they either wanted to pursue other interests or that their occupation is transferable between sectors, as with an IT specialism. Only a couple of respondents reported having a negative experience in the sector.

Of those who plan to continue working in the sector, over half (51.5%) reported that they aspire to undertake a managerial or senior official role, whilst nearly a third (31.5%) aspire to becoming a professional within the sector (Figure 27).
**Influencing factors to entering the sector**

Recent entrants to the sector, and those undergraduates who said they would consider working in the sector upon graduation, were asked what had influenced their decision to join or consider joining the sector. Figure 28 shows that approximately half of these undergraduates and recent entrants (50.0% and 48.7%, respectively) reported that the prospect of good career opportunities in the sector influenced their decisions. A further third (35.1% and 34.4%, respectively) highlighted that their university studies were a key influencing factor, whilst approximately a quarter (23.6% and 23.4%, respectively) state that a work experience placement or internship in the sector influenced these decisions. A higher proportion of recent entrants reported that the reputation of a particular employer in the sector (22.7%), or encouragement from family and friends (21.4%) influenced these decisions than for undergraduates (8.8% and 10.1%, respectively). Those who selected other influences mentioned personal interest, having always wanted to work in the sector, and growing up on a farm.
Of the recent entrants who reported being influenced by a work experience placement or internship in the sector, the majority (80.6%) reported completing this whilst undertaking higher education. Of these, 46.4% reported that the higher education institution organised this compared with 53.6% who reported organising it themselves. A further 16.7% reported that they undertook their work experience or internship after completing higher education, whilst 13.9% undertook it before entering higher education.

Whilst year of study had no statistically significant impact on the influencing factors cited by undergraduate respondents, some subtle differences can be seen between responses from those who have just completed their first year of study and those who are a year more advanced. As Figure 29 shows, a slightly higher proportion of undergraduates who had completed their second year were influenced to consider a career in the sector by the prospect of good career opportunities, or by a visit to a graduate fair, (52.9% and 10.3%, respectively) than for those who had just completed their first year of study (47.5% and 6.3%, respectively). More dramatically, a higher proportion of undergraduates who had completed their first year were influenced by a work experience placement or internship in the sector than for those who had just completed their second year (30.0% and 16.2%, respectively). Undergraduates who had completed their first year were more likely to cite the prospect of good career opportunities as an influencing factor (50.8% compared with 48.7%) and to have been encouraged by their higher education tutor/lecturer (7.4% compared with 9.7%).
year of study were also slightly more likely to be influenced by the reputation of a particular employer in the sector, encouragement from their school or careers advisor prior to undertaking higher education, or by an employer who had visited their university (12.5%, 8.8% and 7.5%, respectively) than were those who had just completed their second year (4.4%, 2.9% and 1.5%, respectively).

**Figure 29:** Influencing factors for entering the sector, for undergraduates completing their first and second years of study (variable bases)

**Importance of influencing factors**

Respondents were also asked to rate how important these factors were in influencing their decision to work in, or consider working in, the agriculture and food sector. Although few respondents reported being influenced by an incentive, those who did rated its importance highly (6.3 for recent entrants and 5.2 for
undergraduates), as shown in Figure 30. Undergraduates and recent entrants rated the prospect of good career opportunities (5.4 and 6.1, respectively) and a work experience placement or internship in the sector (5.4 and 6.1, respectively) as important influencing factors. As highlighted in Figure 30, respondents rate all of these influencing factors as important.

Figure 30: Importance of influencing factors (bases variable)