The world is your oyster

Attracting young people to the seafood sector
Young talent is vital to the future of the seafood industry but it's a hard sell and fewer people are being attracted than ever before. Many don't know what types of job are available, while others have negative perceptions of the industry as a whole.

"It's just the idea of doing the same thing all day long, stinking of fish. No one would say it was their dream job, would they?"

Market research participant

To better understand attitudes and the barriers that might exist, Seafish recently commissioned research to find out what young people (between the ages of 16 and 18) thought about careers in the seafood sector.

The findings were quite alarming. The next generation of school leavers see jobs in seafood as low-skilled, unexciting and focused on handling fish. As a result, the industry faces a challenge to address misconceptions and offer a more attractive proposition to attract young people.

This guide takes a look at the research findings and highlights the most effective ways to reach young people, including the important audience-specific messages to focus on.
What young people want
We interviewed 16 to 18 year olds from Aberdeen, Hull and Exeter. Across all ages and academic ability, male and female, and including some who were thinking about university.

Whether trying to encourage more young people into the industry as a whole or advertising for an individual role, the findings provided some important insight on what messages to focus on — and what young people actually want.

Starting with individual motivations, young people (not surprisingly) want varied and interesting jobs. They want opportunities for promotion and development, decent pay and the chance to work with other young people.

In theory, that’s all easy to demonstrate. The seafood sector is thriving, with a wide range of jobs that offer career progression and good pay — and don’t all involve handling fish. Furthermore, at a time when going to university doesn’t always guarantee good career prospects, the seafood industry can offer apprenticeships and opportunities to ‘earn while you learn’.

The trouble is, these messages are not reaching the people that matter.

"I look at my mum and dad and they both hate their jobs. I want a job that I look forward to every day, where I’m proud of what I’m doing."

Market research participant

Top 5 things young people look for in a job:

- Enjoyment
- Good pay
- Opportunities
- Variety
- Travel

The research
Fishing for information
What young people think

Across all ages, gender and academic ability in our sample group, the responses were very similar. In Aberdeen, Hull and Exeter, the seafood sector was little known or understood and, because most young people struggled to imagine what kind of jobs it might include, few had considered a career.

The most common jobs mentioned were fisherman, fishmonger, chef and fish factory worker — but they were largely perceived as being smelly, dirty and possibly dangerous. Even those who had considered a career as a chef, did not want to work exclusively with fish or shellfish, while working in a fish and chip shop was not seen as a good long-term prospect. Some were also concerned at what other people would think.

Of the small number who were open-minded, all were boys who had considered a job on a fishing vessel.

“I’ve never thought about it (the seafood sector) but I’m expecting that the jobs will be hard and dirty, and you would stink. It’s not exactly grabbing me.”

Market research participant

Top 5 turn-offs in the seafood sector:

- Handling fish
- Smelly, dirty or dangerous
- Limited prospects
- Peer perceptions
- Low pay
The challenges
Swimming against the tide

So, what are the biggest barriers to attracting young people into the seafood industry? Quite simply, the sector is not front of mind for most young people today — not helped by the fact that most don't eat fish or shellfish.

As a result, there's a lack of understanding about the jobs available — with any 'understanding' fuelled by misconceptions that the sector is dominated by mostly older men, that it's in decline and that jobs are low paid, low-skilled and unpleasant. Schools and colleges don't always help by encouraging university, and portraying apprenticeships and learning on the job as fall-back options for school leavers.

The research also revealed that many of these misconceptions are self-perpetuating. Young people sought information on future careers from websites recommended by their schools, and only researched jobs they had heard of.

Here, the response is clear: the seafood industry and local employers should engage with teachers and career advisors, attend careers fairs and look for opportunities to develop closer links with individual schools.

There is a need to promote fish specifically to young people as a healthy, tasty and sustainable food.
The campaign materials
Baiting the hook

Our research was based on various campaign materials that Seafish has developed: a ‘career map’ showing different types of job options within the industry; an infographic showing career opportunities and benefits; and a video.

The materials produced mixed responses, from surprise (at the number of job types available) and curiosity (to find out more) to scepticism (Travel the world) and nervousness (Start your own business). Nevertheless, there is much to learn from student feedback.

“I’m quite shocked. I didn’t think there were as many jobs, and they don’t all involve handling fish. It’s given me something to think about.”

Lessons to learn
1. The young people (all heavy social media users) responded best to an interactive, highly visual approach using a mix of media
2. Content should be punchy and informal and make no assumption about level of knowledge or understanding
3. Information about what jobs entail should be specific and detailed
4. Real-life case studies are a good way of reinforcing positive messages

“I don’t mind the idea of working with fish if it pays okay. My mates would say stuff but if I was earning good money, I wouldn’t mind.”

“That all sound really appealing – much more exciting than I thought – like the possibilities are limitless.”

Market research participants

If you’d like some of our promotional careers’ materials to use when promoting your own job opportunities, please contact: seafish@seafish.co.uk

Top 5 sources of job information:
- School
- Parents
- Online
- Social media
- TV

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
4 paths into the seafood industry

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CAREERS IN THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY AND THE RANGE OF TRAINING AVAILABLE VISIT
www.seafish.org/training

*Parents*
The conclusion
Steering the right course

It’s a cliché of course, but if you want to catch the best fish you need the right bait. The seafood industry is struggling to attract bright and ambitious school leavers because young people don’t see it as an interesting and rewarding career.

The challenge for the industry and individual employers is to break down misconceptions with positive messages about the wide range of jobs, good pay and progression opportunities, and the chance to be part of a thriving and sustainable industry.

These messages can best be delivered by having stronger links to schools, attending career fairs, producing clear and compelling information (including highly visual material, engaging job adverts and real-life case studies) and engaging with young people online and on social media.
This is a mock example of an advert for a seafood industry job. To help encourage younger applicants, the description should sound inspirational and exciting.

A great career in seafood... no catch

We’re an award-winning smokehouse and artisan food outlet. You’ll be an ambitious school-leaver eager to learn.

Following a period of strong growth, we’re looking to recruit a new member of our production team to learn about our business – from sea to plate.

We’ll offer on-the-job training and an attractive salary, with opportunities for promotion for the right candidate.

If you have a passion for wholesome food and are able to work in a fast-paced environment preparing seafood and packaging orders, we’d love to hear from you.

Just send us your CV and a short covering letter explaining why you’d be our “catch of the day”.

Apply to: careers@seafoodcompany.co.uk
For further details and guidance about the information in this report, please contact: seafish@seafish.co.uk