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A special careers supplement

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THE INDEPENDENT



## Sweet SUCCESS

How to be a chocolate taster  
(and other dream jobs in  
the food industry)

02

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COURSES AND CAREERS

# Find your field of expertise

Whether dreaming up recipes or eradicating salmonella, food scientists are in hot demand. By **Kate Hilpern**

Ever wondered why some ready meals feel like you're chewing on cardboard while others are as good as homemade? Or how your cereal manufacturer packs in all those nutrients? Or how ice cream can be low fat? Such are the challenges of food scientists working in the manufacture of food and drink products.

These individuals work on existing and newly discovered ingredients and technologies to come up with ever more innovative recipes and creations. Whether you're a product developer, quality assurance manager or food technologist – or one of the many other roles available – you could be involved in anything from conducting experiments to designing processes, to selecting products from suppliers.

Armed with a degree in food science, you can also work in academia where you might, for instance, research the impact of genetic modification techniques on food production policies or lecture on food safety. Then there's consultancy work, where you advise others on how to get the best flavour using the most ethical suppliers and meeting the requirements of international law. Or you could choose to work in regulation for an organisation like the Foods Standards Agency, or in environmental health for a local council. In addition, there are jobs in food microbiology, in sensory science and many others besides.

There are even roles that cut across both academia

and industry. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) enable students to use their academic knowledge to work on a specific project within a company. The university gets the satisfaction of transferring their academic knowledge to industry and the business benefits from strategic development. Often, you'll get a qualification out of it, perhaps even a PhD, and you might be offered a job by the company at the end because you've added so much value.

With our ever-growing interest in what we eat, how we cook it and where food comes from, food science has much to offer as a career. "Ethical issues are a priority for many people working in food science," says Andy Taylor, professor

## YOU CAN PUSH BOUNDARIES AND INNOVATE IN AREAS FROM ETHICS TO FLAVOUR AND HEALTH

of flavour technology at the University of Nottingham. "As people become more willing to pay for their food – free-range chickens, for instance – I think ethics will creep even higher up the agenda for food scientists."

However, so few people are entering the industry that many employers are resorting to recruiting from overseas. Taylor believes schools are partly responsible. "Although they put food technology on the curriculum, a lot of teach-

ers aren't prepared for what it really means, with the result that in some schools it still basically means old-fashioned domestic science," he says.

Richard Marshall, course leader for the MSc in food science at London Metropolitan University, believes another problem is that roles in food science aren't that visible in everyday life, with the consequence that people often don't realise they exist.

The reality, he says, is that you can push boundaries and innovate in areas ranging from ethics to flavour and from preservation of food to health – and you'll never be short of challenges to overcome. "One example is that salmonella was the biggest problem with chickens a few years ago, but largely through improvements in hygiene and inoculation of the national flock, we've pretty much got rid of it. Today, there are new challenges – among them *campylobacter*. A few years ago we didn't know it existed as a food organism. We didn't have the technology to grow it in a lab and identify it. But in another few years time we may well eliminate that and something else will cause problems that we don't know about at this point."

Food scientists need an inquisitive mind, attention to detail and good communication skills. Most jobs require a degree, although qualifications such as HNDs and foundation degrees also exist. Courses range from straight food science or



Free range: the ethics of how food is produced is a growing concern for food industry professionals GETTY IMAGES

technology through to the more specialised food safety and quality or food and marketing management. If you're unsure which one to go for, Marshall advises phoning the university. "I often get people contacting me saying what's your course like and what jobs could it lead to?"

Choose a university with good contacts with industry and consider whether you want to do a course that incorporates a year in placement. You might also want to find out what areas the

department has a special interest in. "In our case, it's microbiology and the analysis of food. Another university might specialise in the processing and engineering side or flavour perception," says Marshall.

As the production of food becomes increasingly global, many food science departments of UK universities are forming links with European universities. "I have two visits coming up to Lithuania and Rome and I'll talk to the students about the style of teaching in the UK. Staff also come from overseas to talk to my students. It's invigorating because it gives you a wider view. Sometimes student exchanges are possible," says Marshall.

John Birkett, subject team leader for food at Sheffield Hallam University, insists you don't have to be as into science as you might think. "Some courses are very 'sciencey' but others are less so," he says.

Carolyn Douglass, new product development manager at Jordans cereals, says that a passion for food is most important. "If you've got that passion, this is a fantastic job because no two days are every the same. Today, I've been in a meeting with a sugar supplier to

make sure we're including the best type and flavour of sugar, and tomorrow I'll be working with Jordans' marketers about getting the right message across to consumers. I'm concerned about the taste of the product, as well as its safety and nutrition, and I also touch on advertising issues, environmental and ethical issues and pack design."

Maria Johnson used to manage delis, but decided at 30 years old to do a food

## 'I'M CONCERNED ABOUT THE TASTE OF THE PRODUCT, AS WELL AS ITS SAFETY, NUTRITION AND PACK DESIGN'

science degree so that she could move into a less hands-on, more office-based, career in food. Today, she is business development executive for the wholesalers Leatham's. "I meet customers and communicate with their product development department and show them the ingredients we can supply and how they can apply them in different recipes," she says.

"If they decide they like a product, I'll work with them throughout the pro-

cess of them using it and ensure they always have sufficient stock. That alone is challenging. We depend on suppliers from places such as Italy and if the lorry breaks down, I have to find a solution. It's a very engaging, stimulating, varied job and, best of all, it was quite easy to get into."

Elizabeth Georgeou, who is service manager for environmental improvement at Brent Council, also raves about her job. "We are one of the few authorities which has a high ethnic population than the indigenous population, so the wide variety of foods I come across makes for fascinating work," she says.

On graduating with her degree in food science, Georgeou worked for a manufacturer of delicatessen products who supplied major supermarkets. "There I did supplier audits, development of systems to ensure that safe food is produced and dealt with consumer complaints. Through this work, I became interested in environmental health."

For Mharie Forrester, a technical auditor at Northern Foods, travelling the world is among her favourite aspects of the job. "I get to see so many places and I'm always learning," she says.

## # 'I worked with organisations to bring African cuisine into the mainstream'

**Dominga Martins is a training consultant for Safety Plus, which offers training and consultancy in areas such as food hygiene, food safety, nutrition and health and safety.**

The kinds of companies we work with range from catering firms to food retailers.

After I'd done a food science degree, I worked for companies including Wall's Ice Cream and Highgrade Foods, which supplies ready meals for supermarkets. There I worked in marketing, product development and quality control. With that kind of experience both here and abroad, I began to



realise my flare was with consumers on the creative side and I moved into consultancy. I started to focus on transforming food – using all five senses to make it really good – as well as on meeting international stan-

dards. For instance, I worked with a lot of ethnic minority organisations that wanted to bring foods such as African cuisine into the mainstream.

After a while, I decided to go back to university to do a Masters in food science. The idea was to touch up on things that really interested me – notably food and consumer studies.

I love my current role. I've always had a drive to own something and now I own my own business. I also really enjoy the nature of the work itself – transforming food through the consultancy work and helping companies comply with legislation through training. We work with both big and small com-

panies, mostly in London.

It is hard work and it can be very challenging, particularly training people who have limited knowledge and don't seem to want to learn. It can be frustrating, but you have to say, "Listen, this is what the law says, you have to work with it".

Despite its name, food science is definitely a job for creative people. And as the need for more food scientists increases, jobs will become even easier to come by.

One of the most interesting trends at the moment is food technologists coming up with their own products. It's a relatively new niche and I think we'll see more of it.



'IF I'VE DONE A LOT OF TASTING I FEEL LIKE I NEVER WANT TO EAT ANOTHER CHOCOLATE IN MY LIFE - BUT THE NEXT DAY I'M FINE'

# 'One day, I might be doing tasting and another travelling to a trade show'

**Micah Carr-Hill (above) is head of taste for Green & Black's**

Having worked in the wine industry for a few years, I got to the point where it was a toss up between becoming a Master of Wine or going back to university to study food science. I chose the latter because although wine was a big hobby, I am really interested in food and was beginning to realise just how many opportunities there are in the industry. Also, I was interested in the creativity of food development and the

taste of food, as well as the science side - and so food science seemed the perfect fit. I considered becoming a chef but didn't fancy making the same thing every day.

I was 25 when I started my degree at South Bank University and 29 when I left. I enjoyed the course and found it quite easy to get a job afterwards. I'd done a placement at New Covent Garden Soup Company - which was very much encouraged by the university - and my subsequent job at Green & Black's came about as a result of the contacts I made there.

In my current job, I'm a guardian of taste and as such it's about developing new products and ensuring existing products maintain quality and are improved where possible. It involves working closely with the marketing team on the creative side and then working on flavour on the technical side.

One of my favourite things about the role is that it's quite autonomous and very varied. One day, I might be doing the hands-on tasting bit and another travelling to a factory or trade show, and another

working on PR. Nine years down the line, it's still just as stimulating. I also like the fact that when I joined this company, it was small and I've grown with it.

There are downsides. I'm probably fatter! Also, if I've done a lot of tasting, I can feel like I never want another chocolate or ice cream in my life but the next day, I'm fine again. Also the travelling can be tough.

My advice to anyone wanting to go into this industry is forget it if you're not passionate about food.

COMMENT

**Dr Richard Burt**

President, Institute of Food Science and Technology



**A DEGREE IN FOOD SCIENCE OFFERS A WIDE RANGE OF CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

WE ALL RECOGNISE that food is essential as the source of nutrients needed for our survival, but it is also an important part of many social occasions. In both cases, the food must meet our expectations in terms of its flavour, texture, nutritional value and safety. In addition, we may have other requirements for our food, such as the wish to minimise food miles by supporting local producers through farmers' markets, or that the food is produced organically. Whatever our particular needs, they can only be met consistently if the food is produced with skill and professional expertise - and this is where the role of a qualified food scientist becomes essential.

Every day we see television programmes featuring a celebrity chef or some other aspect of food which shows the widespread interest in all aspects of food. We may not always agree with the views expressed or have serious concerns about some of the hygiene practices of the chefs, which often fall far short of the high standards necessary in the food industry. Newspapers, whenever the opportunity arises, fill many column inches with the latest dietary fad for improving health or provide often inadequate details of the latest food scare. In summary, food issues are extremely newsworthy.

For most people, food is something that they buy in the supermarket but give little thought to how it gets on to the shelves. This may reflect well on the efficiency of the major supermarkets in supplying us with food but it hides the complex web of growers, suppliers of food raw materials, food additives and other ingredients, food manufacturers, retailers and a host of other companies involved in the food chain. All these companies employ food scientists and technologists to undertake research and new product development, run production lines and ensure that the final product meets legal requirements as well as the expectations of consumers.

Food science and technology courses cover many scientific disciplines including microbiology, biochemistry, nutrition, physical and chemical properties of food. In addition, most courses will also cover marketing and food legislation. All these aspects of food science and technology are involved in the production, storage, distribution and sale of safe and nutritious food. A degree in food science potentially offers a much wider range of career opportunities to graduates as they will be readily able to specialise in any one of these areas, in contrast to

those graduates with degrees in the more traditional science subjects such as chemistry or physics.

Considerable concern exists about the skills gap which threatens the productivity of the UK food and drink manufacturing industries. Although many career opportunities exist, the number of students entering food-related degrees between 1998 and 2004 fell from around 700 a year to less than 300, although recently some recovery has occurred. This fall in numbers has led to the closure of a number of courses teaching food science and engineering. However, several universities, including Leeds, Nottingham and Reading, are still running excellent food science courses. Several initiatives are underway to improve the supply of food-science graduates including the Northern Foods Foundation for Science and Technology, which sponsors undergraduates on food science courses. In addition, the Institute of Food Science & Technology (IFST) has worked with Improve (the food and drink sector skills council) to identify the factors leading to the decline in the number of food science graduates. Further work is underway to find ways of reversing the trend of falling student numbers.

Most professions have a professional society whose main roles are to raise the profile of its members with the public and relevant organisations, and to improve the professional competence and standards of its members. For food scientists, the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST) fulfils this role in several ways. These include encouraging members to improve their knowledge of food science and technology through a range of publications and meetings which cover the latest developments and also provide opportunities for networking with others in the food industry. An increasingly important role is encouraging members to improve their scientific knowledge through continuous professional development (CPD) through either the chartered scientist programme or company schemes. IFST also provides impartial advice on food issues to the Government and other bodies. These activities all serve the public benefit by raising the quality and safety of the UK food supply and are recognised through IFST's charity status.

This supplement shows the wide range of career opportunities that are available in the food industry, and I hope it encourages more students to take degrees in food science and technology.

The Institute of Food Science and Technology ([www.ifst.org](http://www.ifst.org))

## HEALTH OF THE NATION

A decade ago, the idea of discussing the digestive tract in a TV advertisement for a health drink would have been unthinkable.

Today though, as the mysteries of food science continue to cascade from food scientists to the population as a whole, issues such as probiotic yoghurts or the impact of low glycaemic index (GI) foods on blood sugar levels have become second nature for many of us.

"Members of the profession wouldn't dream of talking about different types of bacteria when they're in the pub for fear of sending everyone to sleep," says Derek Williams, development director of the food and drinks industry skill sector organisation Improve.

"But with the marketing boys now so adept at injecting science into the sales message, what used to be talked about solely in laboratories is now common parlance among consumers."

Food scientists and technologists are at the sharp end of our growing interest in how food is produced and our demand for more comprehensive nutritional labelling, as well as our dislike of nutritional spin.

When it comes down to the minutiae of food science though, there is a gap in our understanding, according to Richard Ratcliffe, principal lecturer and course leader for food science at London Metropolitan University.

Marshall believes that while many young people are eager to follow in the footsteps of Jamie Oliver or Nigella Lawson, the image of a boffin in a white coat fiddling with test-tubes is rather less attractive – only the Fat Duck proprietor and so-called molecular gastronomist, Heston Blumenthal, seems to have successfully combined the image of TV chef and laboratory nerd.

"We have successfully re-branded some of our food science courses to reflect the modern interest in nutrition, but there are always those students who question the need to enter a food lab at all," says Marshall.

# Hidden heroes

TV chefs get all the glory when it comes to focusing attention on what we eat. But food scientists are working behind the scenes every day to ensure our meals are safe, tasty and nutritious. **Virginia Matthews** reports



A lot on their plate: food scientists are in the frontline in fighting the obesity epidemic STOCKBYTE

"The image of the TV chef who wears his hair down is strange for us – hair nets being the norm in all food processing – but it is the TV chef who dominates in terms of perception."

Although the health of the nation rests in the hands of food industry professionals, their work is hidden from view, says Richard Ratcliffe, an independent food scientist and past president of the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST). "The Food Standards Agency was launched in direct response to the growing

incidents of food poisoning and I believe that the food supply is now safer; hence the new attention on MRSA in hospitals," he says.

"While the big food retailers have become far more proactive in areas such as healthy eating, there is also a far higher profile now for what we call 'food service' – restaurant chains, staff canteens and schools, for example."

"Whether it's a supermarket or a fast-food chain though, it is the behind-the-scenes work of food scientists that is making the difference in terms of providing

the public with safe, nutritional and appetising food."

Be it reducing salt in canned foods or launching new hybrid brown/white bread, it is the food professional's job to develop products that not only follow strict safety rules, but which also appeal to new health fads.

Says Williams: "Balancing statutory duties around safety with the need to appeal to the latest demand for quicker, cheaper, more interesting foods – while at the same time making money for employers – can be a bit like being

between a rock and a hard place."

"Add to that the necessity to sum up an entire book's worth of science on a single label on the back of a soup can and you can appreciate the complexity of a job that involves biology, chemistry, physics, biochemistry, microbiology, genetics, biotechnology, radiation science, enzymes and nutrition."

The chocolate industry isn't usually associated with debates on the health of the nation. At Thorntons in Derbyshire though, which prides itself on

using purer *couverture* chocolate in its recipes – minimum 32 per cent cocoa butter – John Chambers, head of new product development, believes that "the benefits of occasional indulgence" are a valid piece of the healthier nation jigsaw.

"The emotional satisfaction of eating something naughty but nice is very important in terms of overall wellbeing and as long as people don't gorge themselves on it, we would argue that chocolate is an enjoyable and comforting treat," he says. "We are a vegetarian, gluten-free product and have already removed artificial colourings and flavourings. Our next move is to get rid of hydrogenated fats."

The public's growing appetite for dark chocolate is already well-established, says Chambers, but while this indicates a more sophisticated palate, it may also be linked to food science.

"Some dark chocolate contains more antioxidants and there are a growing number of people who will buy it simply for that reason," he says.

The reduction of sugar and salt levels in processed food remains a goal. "When you pick up a product that you used to like, but which nowadays tastes bland or perhaps too sweet, it may well be because the manufacturer has drastically reduced the salt or added extra sugar," says Williams. "More food firms are now adopting a staircase approach which allows them to reduce salt and sugar more slowly; weaning people off stronger tastes over time while ensuring that food still has a long shelf-life."

To Richard Ratcliffe, the weightiest issue of public health remains obesity. "Many of us recognise that portion sizes in takeaways are getting bigger and while the FSA likes to believe that all shoppers pore over calorie content labelling, I doubt that this is the case for many people. When it comes to consumer education over food intake versus energy use, it is the food scientist again who will take a leading role in fighting the nation's obesity."

## COMMENT

## Jack Matthews

Chief executive of Improve, the food and drink sector skills council

### A RANGE OF NEW SCHEMES SHOULD ATTRACT FRESH TALENT INTO AN EXCITING, EXPANDING INDUSTRY

THE FOOD and drink manufacturing industry is thriving. With around 470,000 employees and a turnover of £74bn a year, it's the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, and sits second in terms of productivity in the global league of food and drink.

However, research carried out by Improve has shown that the industry is facing a recruitment crisis, with one in four critical product development roles currently vacant.

With technological advancements and ever-increasing demand for new products creating more roles, the shortfall looks set to worsen. In fact, unless more people are attracted to the sector, we predict that by 2014, 13,000 technical and professional roles will remain unfilled.

Why are so few people choosing to enter the profession? Science and technology roles are interesting and challenging, they offer excellent career progression opportunities, and salaries of up to £65,000 for senior positions. The problem stems back to the classroom. With fewer school pupils studying science after GCSEs, universities have seen a steady decline in admissions for food science courses. What's more, many

young people have a negative perception of food and drink manufacturing, wrongly believing it to be low-skilled and low-paid.

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF), which represents the UK food and drink manufacturing industry, is working with Improve to drive up skills levels in the industry, and to ensure that a greater number of highly qualified people are attracted to the sector.

To generate an interest in food manufacturing among

schoolchildren, Improve has launched the Schools Food and Drink Challenge across England. The challenge, originally developed by Scottish Enterprise, sees schools working with a local food manufacturer to set a project for pupils to create a new food product. It's linked directly to the curriculum, and is available at two levels – for secondary pupils aged 14-15, and primary children aged 10-11. Almost 13,000 pupils have already taken

the challenge, and a number of their products have ended up on supermarket shelves.

Schools and colleges in three areas of England are trialling the Young Apprenticeship in Food and Drink Manufacturing. By September, more than 120 pupils aged between 14 and 16 will be undertaking the programme, which is worth four good GCSEs. It's an excellent way to generate excitement about careers in food and drink, and it looks

set to be rolled-out across more areas.

Meanwhile, employers and trade associations are offering schemes to attract A-level students onto food-science courses at university. Northern Foods, for example, has established a charitable Foundation for Science and Technology, which offers bursaries each year to 30 food science and technology undergraduates. Improve is working to open up routes into the sec-

tor for those who don't have a food science degree. In September, the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) will launch the UK's first post-graduate conversion course in food science and technology. It will be open to anyone with an honours degree in any science subject, and, if successful, will be rolled-out across the rest of the UK.

These are exciting times. Our new schemes are already starting to raise awareness about the opportunities available. They will attract more talent and boost the numbers of food scientists and technologists in the sector.

For further information, visit [www.improveltd.co.uk](http://www.improveltd.co.uk) or [www.fdf.org.uk](http://www.fdf.org.uk)



THE PRIVATE SECTOR



Shelf life: setting sell-by and use-by dates is one of the roles of food scientists  
TOM HEVEZI/EPA

# The best possible taste

Improving the range and quality of products on our supermarket shelves is a science in itself, says **Rosalind Ryan**

The Institute of Food Science and Technology defines food science as “the scientific understanding of the composition of food under various conditions”, but this is an incredibly deceptive description of a career that can see you train in nutrition and microbiology, travel the globe to source new foods and ingredients, become an undercover “food cop”, and work out ways to help save the planet with new designs in packaging or food innovation. “Food science is a subject that includes something of all the other sciences,” says Richard Marshall, course leader for the MSc in food science at the London Metropolitan University. “A food scientist will be someone who has an interest in a number of different areas of food; manufacturing, quality, safety – of the food and its impact on the consumer. It’s multidimensional.” “The food industry is an interesting place to work,” agrees Kevin Swoffer, 52, from Maidstone. Swoffer has been working in food science for over 30 years, for companies including Nestlé and Safeway (now Morrisons). Today, he runs his own consultancy company working with food manufacturers and suppliers on various projects, as well as ad-

vising the British Retail Consortium and the Food Standards Agency. “It’s quite a dramatic industry and very fast moving – you’re always keeping up with product developments and the demands of consumers.”

Food scientists are always facing new challenges on how to make food better – whether that’s healthier, safer or tastier. One of the biggest areas currently being tackled is allergies. This can be trying out different ingredients that don’t cause allergies in foods, and carrying out subsequent

**‘YOU’RE ALWAYS KEEPING UP WITH PRODUCT DEVELOPMENTS AND THE DEMANDS OF CONSUMERS’**

tests to see how this alters the product, or it can be making sure the labelling on a product has the correct warnings for those who suffer from certain allergies.

“More people now have more allergies to more products so it’s important to get these things right,” says Simon Hinks. Hinks, 32, from Farnborough, originally wanted to become a chef, but decided on a career in the food industry after doing home eco-

nomics A-level and going on to do a degree in food technology at Reading University. He worked for Sainsbury’s for a number of years before setting up his own consultancy. He says, “It may seem silly putting ‘May contain nuts’ on a jar of peanut butter, but I would rather have the mickey taken out of me than face a legal case.”

Obesity is another area of growing public concern. Food scientists are now looking at how to replace the harmful fats in food with other fats that don’t contribute to obesity.

One of the oldest and most contentious jobs of a food scientist is setting use-by dates on food. When they are decided, teams of food technologists may recreate supermarket aisles in a lab, store products on shelves up to their use-by dates and then take them out and put them in domestic fridges before carrying out safety tests.

Another hot area in food science is how to reduce the impact of food manufacturing on the environment. This could be looking at the way food is produced, such as farming, how to reduce wastage, or focusing on packaging – could it be made from recycled products? It could also involve better transportation of goods once they have been produced.

A career in food science doesn’t just mean you will be stuck working in one place either: “There are fantastic opportunities for travel abroad,” says Marshall. Swoffer says he spent six months working in Greece when he was younger and now travels to the US and Australia to train their major supermarkets in areas such

as safety and quality assurance. He says, “I started off wanting to be a dentist, but now I can’t think of anything worse than looking in people’s mouths all day!” Hinks agrees that a career in food science is full of variety. “It is challenging, but it’s also very rewarding,” he says. “When you’ve been personally involved in launching

a new product, it’s a fantastic feeling to see it on the shelves. I don’t know of many jobs where I’m happy to get up and go to work in the morning.”

For more information, visit [www.foodtechcareers.org](http://www.foodtechcareers.org). For more information on the IFST, visit [www.ifst.org.uk](http://www.ifst.org.uk)

## # ‘I love working with small suppliers as they are so passionate’

**Philippa Brightman, 24, has been working as a product technologist at Sainsbury’s for 18 months. She joined the product technology and development team on a graduate training scheme. She studied a degree in natural sciences at Durham (majoring in anthropology and psychology) and a Masters in applied human nutrition at Oxford Brookes.**



I had always had a real love for cooking and food, and even went to cookery school in my gap year to master simple family recipes. I was also very interested in nutrition and health, but decided against becoming a nutritionist when I looked into working for the food industry in more detail. I knew I could have more of an impact on people’s health by helping to improve the actual products they ate.

My role at Sainsbury’s was very hands-on from the beginning. For the first 12 months I was managing product quality, safety and integrity for yoghurts and some other desserts. I was working with suppliers, sharing ideas on how to improve existing products. Now I’m also involved in product launches, making sure the artwork and label are legally correct.

I don’t carry out any safety or microbiology tests on food as it’s

the suppliers’ responsibility to make sure all their food is safe before it leaves the factory. But we do have a Food and Innovation Centre where we test some food. Teams of mystery shoppers buy products from our stores and then we assess them to make sure they pass different standards for quality such as flavour, texture and appearance.

I love so many different parts of my job – one favourite is working with small suppliers, as they are so passionate about their product. I get to travel to different parts of the world, meeting suppliers and trying new products. It’s also a constant challenge keeping up with the latest food trends and customer expectations.

I have been really surprised at how multidisciplinary the job is; it’s a really diverse role and encompasses a huge number of different disciplines.