

Chef de la Maison Academy

Hospitality Employability Programme



The Story

Chef de la Maison was founded in Peterborough in 1998 by Nathan Higgins, who trained as a chef at Peterborough Regional College and began the business at the age of 19. Over 25 years, the company has delivered more than 3,200 events - from intimate private dinners to landmark occasions including a 1,200-guest Cathedral dinner for the Mayor of Peterborough.

The Academy grew directly from that lived experience. Having built a business rooted in craft, community and real food, Nathan recognised a persistent gap in Peterborough’s hospitality pipeline: talented young people without a clear, supported route into a sustainable career. The Academy was created to close that gap.

“We didn’t build the Academy because it seemed like the right thing to do. We built it because we kept meeting young people who had the ability and the drive, but not the door.”

The Why

Hospitality is one of the UK’s largest employers, yet it carries one of the highest rates of early attrition. Young people - particularly those aged 16–24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) - often enter the sector without the professional foundations, confidence, or mentorship to stay and progress. The Academy operates at the intersection of three urgent priorities:

Youth Employment	Social Mobility	Local Economy
Peterborough has above-average youth unemployment. We create real, structured pathways into work.	Background should not determine career ceiling. Our programme provides the professional grounding to progress.	A skilled, confident local hospitality workforce is good for every business in the city.

How the Programme Works

The Academy runs structured cohorts for young people aged 16–24, combining kitchen and front-of-house training with professional skills development, mentorship, and real-world work experience within Chef de la Maison's live catering operations.



01 Engagement & Assessment

Participants are referred through local partner networks. An initial conversation identifies goals, barriers, and the right level of support needed.

02 Foundation Training

Practical hospitality skills are taught in a real working kitchen and café environment - knife skills, food safety, customer service, and professional conduct.

03 Mentorship & Industry Exposure

Each participant is paired with an industry mentor. Site visits, supplier introductions, and attendance at live Chef de la Maison events bring the sector to life.

04 Work Placement

Participants work alongside our team on genuine catering and events. This is not simulated - they are contributing to real client work under supervision.

05 Progression Support

As the cohort closes, the team works with each individual on CV development, employer introductions, further education options, and employment referrals.

Our Partners

The Academy operates through a structured three-stage partnership model. Each organisation plays a distinct and sequential role in the participant's journey - from initial referral through to employment or further education.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Department for Work & Pensions	Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority	The Youth Hub
Job Centre Work Coaches screen and refer young people aged 16–24 to the Academy. Participants begin with a two-week unpaid work experience placement, gaining their first professional hospitality experience in a live catering environment.	Participants who successfully complete work experience are offered a paid internship funded through the CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer programme - up to 30 hours per week for a minimum of six weeks.	At weeks five to six of the internship, The Youth Hub meets with the Academy team and each participant. They build CVs, explore employment opportunities, and plan next steps in education or work - ensuring no one leaves without a clear pathway forward.



The Outcomes

The Academy measures success not by certificate completion alone, but by what happens next. Our outcomes are tracked across employment, confidence, and continued progression.

Participant	Journey	Participant Journey Where They Are Now
Mohammed	Developed customer service and barista skills throughout the cohort.	Now working as Barista & Customer Excellence at Allia Future Business Centre.
Alex Truss	Participants who successfully complete work experience are offered a paid internship funded through the CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer programme - up to 30 hours per week for a minimum of six weeks.	At weeks five to six of the internship, The Youth Hub meets with the Academy team and each participant. They build CVs, explore employment opportunities, and plan next steps in education or work — ensuring no one leaves without a clear pathway forward.
Callum	Lead Barista who featured in a Cathedral and Mayor of Peterborough event.	Active team member, ongoing progression within the business.

Beyond individual progression, the Academy contributes to a wider local hospitality ecosystem - reducing employer recruitment costs, raising the standard of entry-level talent, and demonstrating that a Peterborough business can be both commercially successful and genuinely purposeful.







Participant Case Study

Mohammed (Mo) Line Cook | Chef de la Maison, Allia Future Business Centre

Pathway: **DWP Work Experience → CPCA Internship → Full-Time Employment**

2 weeks	6 weeks	Full-Time
DWP Work Experience	CPCA Paid Internship (30 hrs/wk)	Permanent Employment Achieved

Background

Mohammed - known to the team as Mo - joined the Chef de la Maison Academy through the DWP Work Experience Programme. Mo's journey is a testament to what a structured programme, consistent mentorship, and a young person's own determination can achieve together.

Work Experience – DWP Referral

Mo completed two weeks of structured work experience with Chef de la Maison. His induction provided hands-on exposure across the full range of hospitality disciplines:

- Customer Service Excellence
- Front of House & Hospitality Operations
- Barista Skills & Espresso Craft
- Catering & Food Preparation
- Baking Fundamentals
- Line Cooking

Mo demonstrated particular aptitude and passion in the kitchen. His focus and work ethic in the catering and line cooking environment set him apart, and it became clear early on that this was where he could build a meaningful career.

CPCA Internship – Paid Progression

Following his placement, Mo was moved forward onto the Academy's CPCA Internship Programme - a six-week, paid internship running at 30 hours per week. This provided Mo with structured, employer-led progression, a real income, and the opportunity to prove himself in a professional kitchen environment.

“Mo grabbed the opportunity. The internship was not just a stepping stone - it was the bridge between potential and a professional career. Mo committed fully, and his development during this period was significant.”

From Participant to Employee

After completing his internship, Mo was offered a full-time position as Line Cook at Chef de la Maison, based at Allia Future Business Centre, Peterborough. He is a valued, permanent member of our kitchen team and an example of the Academy's programme delivering exactly what it was designed to achieve.





Our Observations

Mo's growth throughout the programme has been visible across every area that matters to us as employers and as educators:

- Self-confidence - Mo has grown into his role with an assured, professional presence in the kitchen.
- Communication skills - He communicates clearly with team members and responds positively to direction and feedback.
- Work ethic - Consistent, reliable, and always willing to go beyond what is asked of him.
- Kitchen competence - Mo's technical skills as a line cook have developed to a professional standard.
- Team contribution - He is an integral part of the kitchen team, supporting colleagues and contributing to service quality.
- Compliance & responsibility - Mo consistently follows kitchen protocols, food safety procedures, and hygiene standards.
- Methodical approach - His attention to detail and consistency in preparation is a real strength in a professional kitchen environment.

Journey Timeline

2025	Referred to Chef de la Maison Academy via DWP Work Experience Programme
Week 1-2	Two-week induction: customer service, hospitality, barista, catering, baking, line cooking
Week 2	Identified as strong kitchen talent - excelling in catering and line cooking
CPCA	Six-week paid CPCA Internship - 30 hours per week of structured employer-led development
2025/26	Offered and accepted full-time employment as Line Cook at Allia Future Business Centre

Why Mo's Story Matters

Mo's journey from DWP referral to full-time employed Line Cook is exactly the outcome the Chef de la Maison Academy was built to create. He arrived through a pathway designed to support young people facing barriers to employment — and he leaves it with a career, a professional skillset, and a future in hospitality.

Mo is a prime example of why our Academy programmes work, and why the sustainability of this provision matters so deeply. Every young person who comes through our doors has the potential to follow a path like Mo's. We need to build more structures, more opportunities, and more support to make that possible for others.



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