



the SCHOOL FOOD people LACA

FINISHING TOUCHES

PROMOTING CULINARY TALENT

2026

SPONSORED BY **McDougalls** since 1864

Wednesday 8th July 2026
Hilton Birmingham
Metropole

2025 Best in Show Winner
 Rebecca Britten
 Impact Food Group



Competition held in association with the Craft Guild of Chefs

Dear colleagues

Finishing Touches is firmly established as the key opportunity for school caterers to show their culinary talents and for their skills to be judged by the Craft Guild of Chefs against national standards. We are pleased to welcome back McDougalls as sponsor for this year's competition.

The School Food People is rightly proud of the high quality of entries in the competition and in seeing the progressive rise in entries in recent years across the range of categories, showing the passion in our industry for craft skills among our staff.

Finishing Touches will be open for entries on **Wednesday 8th July** – this is to give as many competitors as possible the chance to enter the competition and be at the venue for the announcement of the Best in Show winner at the end of the day.

To refresh the competition for this year, some classes have been retired and some new classes added - see pages 4 and 5 for further details on the new categories. There are 14 categories covering sweet and savoury, highly decorated cakes to traybakes suitable to serve in schools across the country, giving entrants the opportunity to showcase different skill sets from cake baking and decorating, a savoury quiche and cakes for special diets. We feel there really is something for everyone to try their hand at, a great way to highlight the talent across our profession.

In addition to the cash prize, the Best in Show winner, chosen from all Best in Class entries, will be invited to join the judging panel for next year's Finishing Touches competition as part of their prize.

We hope to see the number of entries up again this year, showcasing the profile of school catering which has never been higher and a great way to display the talents within our industry.

Good luck and I look forward to seeing your entries on display in July

Brad Pearce, The School Food People National Chair

Finishing Touches is a culinary salon organised by The School Food People in association with the Craft Guild of Chefs. Now in its 18th year the competition is aimed at all levels of staff employed in any aspect of education catering capable of producing excellent craft pieces. It provides entrants with the opportunity to show off their skills which would not normally be seen during their everyday profession.

The Finishing Touches Display Salon will take place during the School Food People Show & Forum on **Wednesday 8th July** at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole.

The criteria has been set by the Craft Guild of Chefs and are explained over the next few pages. The Craft Guild of Chefs will judge the entries and certificates of entry will be awarded to all entrants. Gold, Silver and Bronze certificates will be awarded to those who achieve the highest standards and a Best in Class will be picked in each category as well as a Best in Show from all categories.

We look forward to receiving your registrations by Friday 29th May and to seeing your work on display in July.

Display Static Classes:

- ★ **50% Fruit Dessert**
- ★ **Cake Suitable for Special Diet**
- ★ **Cheesecake**
- ★ **Choux Pastry - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **Decorated Celebration Cake**
- ★ **Decorated Novelty Cake**
- ★ **Flat Bas Relief Plaque**
- ★ **Homemade relish, chutney or preserve - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **McDougalls Victoria Sponge**
- ★ **Apprentice Challenge - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **Muffins - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **Nut-free Bakewell Tart - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **Savoury Rolls - NEW FOR 2026**
- ★ **Tray Bake**
- ★ **Vegetarian Quiche**

The Craft Guild of Chefs are so pleased to be involved with this display salon once again and every year look forward to seeing some of the great dishes and presentation pieces that are put forward.

Following feedback from both judges and competitors last year, we have decided to retire some of the classes for this year and replace with six new categories for you to enter.

We will once again be presenting and judging all the classes in one day – Wednesday 8th July. This format gives competitors and delegates plenty of time to view the entries whilst my team of expert judges carefully marked the pieces.

Please read the criteria carefully for each class for clear guidance on what is and is not permitted. Can I just reiterate to you that, however fantastic the piece you present, if it doesn't meet the criteria and cannot be changed to another class on the day, I am sorry to say it won't be marked. Please feel free to contact the organisers with any questions you have and I'll be happy to respond. Remember - if in doubt, just ask.

We are looking forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to this year's event in Birmingham, showcasing all the talent in the Education sector.

Good luck and enjoy your cooking!!!!

**Steve Munkley MBE GCFA CG Hon Prof
Vice President Craft Guild of Chefs**



McDougalls from Premier Foods is delighted to once again sponsor The School Food People's Finishing Touches competition. This prestigious event continues to shine a spotlight on the incredible talent and dedication of school chefs, providing a platform to showcase their passion, creativity, and exceptional culinary skills.

Finishing Touches is open to employees at all levels within the education catering sector, and we look forward to seeing what this year's competitors bring to the event. Year after year, we are impressed by the high standard of entries across all categories, including cakes, tarts, desserts, and savoury dishes.

Our range of McDougalls Flour, Flour-Based Mixes, and Reduced Fat Cocoa Powder offers a simple yet versatile base for a wide variety of sweet and savoury creations, making them ideal for use in this competition. We're also looking forward to being part of the judging panel and celebrating the outstanding culinary talent within the education sector.

Best of luck to everyone entering.

Mariela Petkova
Channel Marketing Manager - Foodservice



★ ENTER TO WIN UP TO £350 IN PRIZES

£100
prize for each Best in Class winner

£250
prize for the overall Best in Show winner

Entry Criteria

50% Fruit Dessert

This class will be looking for four plated portions of a creative dessert that would be served to students; it must consist of a minimum of 50% fruit in its content. The fruit used can be fresh, dried, frozen or canned. The remaining ingredients are the choice of the competitor, but must not contain any nuts or pastry.

This class will be tasted and the use of fresh fruits not in season in July will be discouraged.

Cake suitable for special diet

Competitors are required to prepare an 8-10 portion whole cake, suitable to be served to children who have either gluten or dairy intolerance or both. A recipe card is required to be presented next to the cake listing all the ingredients used.

This class will be tasted

Cheesecake

The judges will be looking for an 8-12 portion cheesecake, which will be served as a whole cake; it can be of any shape and decorated appropriately. The cheesecake may consist of a baked or set mixture with any flavour or filling of the competitor's choice, but no nuts are to be used, however coconut will be permitted. A precise recipe, description and list of allergens for the cheesecake will need to be displayed next to the exhibit.

This dish will be tasted

Choux Pastry - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Entries are required for 6 pieces of the same individual snack style pastry, which is made from a base of choux pastry. This could be a chocolate éclair, profiterole, mini Paris Brest or any shape of pastry using the choux as a base. Fillings and toppings can be the entrants own choice. The 6 pieces will need to be presented on 1 platter to showcase the consistency of size and decoration of each piece.

This class will not be tasted but cut to see inside of the pastry that it is cooked correctly and how the filling looks. A menu with ingredients, description and allergens is required.

Decorated Celebration Cake

A celebration cake can be any shape with a maximum display area of 40cm x 40cm.

Coated with rolled fondant, sugar paste, or royal icing. Dummy bases may be used.

Decoration of competitor's choice, but no non edible material may penetrate the coating of the cake. Wired flowers may be placed on the cake, but the stems must not be inserted into the coating. Cakes must be presented on suitable boards

Decorated Novelty Cake

A novelty cake, any shape coated with any decorative medium, having a maximum display area 45cm x 45cm. The cake will be cut and tasted. Marking criteria will take into account serving and eating quality of the cake, creativity, visual impact and skills used. No artificial decoration (that is wires, cocktail sticks, posy picks, lolly sticks etc) may penetrate the coating, but may be used in the piece.

Flat Bas Relief Plaque (3D plaque) - REVISED FOR 2026

Decorate a plaque using sugar paste in the style of "Bas Relief" not to exceed 16cm and depicting the theme of a typical school lunch, colours of the competitor's choice.

Further information:

Bas-relief is a sculpture in which the design projects slightly from the background of the plaque and it is a useful technique which works well on pastillage. In sugarcraft, creating a bas-relief involves using a template and padding out a figure or object to achieve a 2-3 dimensional effect that is raised from the plaque. Almost any design can be transformed into a bas-relief to create a beautiful cake topper or design plaque and it is now becoming a popular cake decorating technique. Many other sugarcraft techniques work well with bas-relief; applique, embossing, hand painting and royal icing to name a few. You can achieve an infinite variety of designs by combining techniques.



Entry Criteria

Homemade chutney, relish or preserve - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Competitors are asked to present in a service container one of the following - a homemade relish, chutney or jam. This is to be accompanied by a homemade biscuit, cracker or bread to complement the product. The accompaniment can be any style the competitor's wishes eg; cheese straw, pepper cracker, sour dough slice. The relish, chutney or preserve and accompaniment will all be tasted and marked. This will be tasted and a menu with ingredients, description and allergens is required.



McDougalls Victoria Sponge - Apprentice Challenge - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Open to Level 2 Apprentices working in a school kitchen setting - entries are required for a Victoria sandwich style sponge, using only McDougall's convenience mix. The sponge can be either round, square or rectangular but must not exceed 20cm (8inches) on the longest side or in circumference. The sponge may be flavoured and must be sandwiched with either or both, jam and buttercream. The sponge can be topped with icing sugar or piped on buttercream but no further garnish is allowed. No fresh cream to be used. This class will be tasted and judges will be looking for flavour, texture and cooking degrees. Allergen list to be provided



Muffins - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Entries are required for single portion muffins, 3 different flavours, 2 equal pieces of each. Toppings added after cooking are not required and if added will not be marked. Flavours and fruits should be added to the base recipe. Judges will be looking for the clean flavours of the base cakes which can be made from fresh recipes or convenient mixes. This class will be tasted and a menu with ingredients, description and allergens is required.



Nut-free Bakewell Tart - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Entries are sought for a 6-8 portion single nut-free Bakewell tart, with a maximum size of 20cm (8 inches). This should consist of a pastry outer and sponge style filling which can be flavoured to the competitor's choice. The tart can be topped with a lattice, glazed with jam or jel, but no additional toppings are allowed. This class will be tasted and a menu with ingredients, description and allergens is required.



Savoury Rolls - NEW CLASS FOR 2026

Entries are required for 6 individual portions of a snack item savoury roll, which can have any style of filling - meat, fish, vegetarian or vegan based. The wrapper for this roll must be pastry style, eg: short, puff, rough puff, filo style. The 6 pieces will be presented on 1 platter to showcase the consistency of size, glazing and cooking of each piece. This class will be tasted and a menu with ingredients, description and allergens is required.



Tray Bake - REVISED FOR 2026

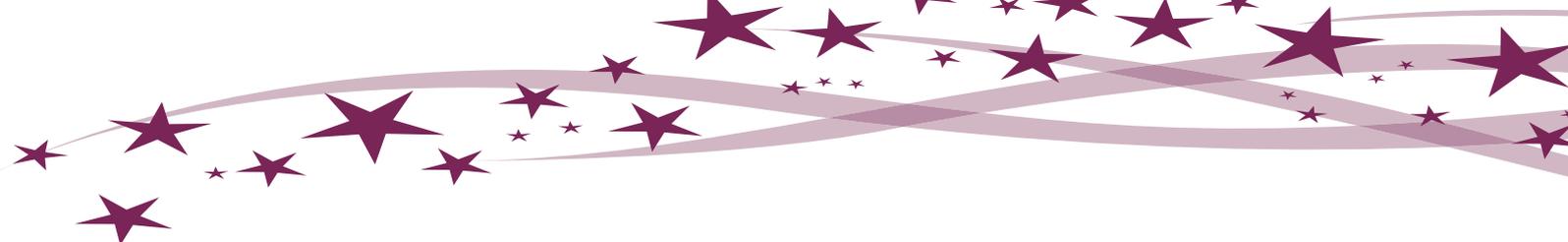
Suitable for lunch dessert or snack, tray bakes can be eye-catching, creative and innovative. Whether it's a rocky road or brownie or a unique flapjack or energy bar. The tray bake needs to represent 8 portions in total and can be either presented cut in to 8 portions 2 presented for tasting or 6 portions left whole with 2 portions cut for tasting. Serving platter should reflect the appropriate size of the tray bakes. This class will be tasted and a menu with a brief description of the dish and allergens listed is required.



Vegetarian Quiche

Entries are required for a 18-20cm (7-8inch) vegetarian quiche. The judges will be looking for an evenly lined and baked flan base with a well-cooked filling. The filling can include dairy products including cheese, a recipe card will be required with allergens listed. This class will be cut but NOT tasted





Rules and Guidelines

- 1 Entries can be made online at www.theschoolfoodpeople.co.uk and must be received no later than Friday 29th May 2026.
- 2 **Finishing Touches is open for entries in all classes on Wednesday 8th July 2026 ONLY.**
- 3 On arrival, please report to the Finishing Touches registration desk where you will be directed to your display table. The registration desk will be open from 8am on Wednesday 8th July.
- 4 There will be an area allocated for finishing dishes but this will not have any equipment or cooking facilities. All entries will be photographed prior to being moved to the display tables.
- 5 Each candidate will have a maximum area for presentation of 60cm x 60cm. Additional cloths and boxes for presentation may be used but only within the allocated space, any impediment of this will render points being deducted.
- 6 Judging of entries will take place from 10am on Wednesday 8th July. Entries received after 10am will still be displayed and judged.
- 7 All results will be displayed by the exhibits as soon as the judging of the category is complete. Awards will be given when the following standards are achieved:
 - ★ Gold Award 90% or more
 - ★ Silver Award 75% or more
 - ★ Bronze Award 65% or more
 - ★ Certificate of Merit 55% or more
- 8 **Best in Class and Best in Show Awards**
The Best in Class in all categories will be announced on Wednesday 8th July at 3pm followed by the announcement of the The Best in Show winner.
- 9 Entries can be removed from 4pm on Wednesday 8th July and no earlier. All entries should be removed no later than 4.30pm on the day; any items in the room after this time will be removed by the organisers and may be disposed of. Removal of the show pieces and all other items brought for finishing are the responsibility of the entrant.
- 10 Judges will be available for feedback after judging in the salon area.
- 11 A prize of £100 will be offered for each class and £250 for the overall Best in Show.

Important Information

- 1 Read the rules and guidelines carefully.
- 2 Ensure your entry meets the criteria of the class - it will not be judged if it deviates from the entry criteria and can't be moved to another class.
- 3 Read through the judging criteria on the next page and remember that every entry starts with full marks so devise your display piece to keep as many marks as possible at the judging stage.
- 4 If tasted, remember to serve fresh.
- 5 Think about textures and colours.
- 6 Balance of ingredients on the platter.
- 7 Clean the dish thoroughly before serving.
- 8 Use of nuts (with the exception of coconut) or alcohol is not permitted
- 9 Keep all the pieces even in size.
- 10 Make sure you have tasted your dishes during your practice sessions.
- 11 Ensure the dish is practical for production in a real working environment.
- 12 Ensure the dish is practical for service to the customer and can be eaten with ease.
- 13 Draw up a checklist of equipment and ingredients and use as a guide.
- 14 Allow plenty of time for travel, allowing for delays, parking, access and unloading.
- 15 Always ask judges for feedback, no matter what the result.
- 16 Remember judges are asked for their opinion on the basis of their experience. You may not always agree and it is only their opinion but if collectively they agree you may have to accept to differ. Learn at every opportunity from the feedback.
- 17 Make sure you make use of the finishing area at the venue to present dishes at their best and looking really fresh.

Judging Criteria - tasted classes

First Impression – 10 marks

- Visual Impact
- Regular in shape and size
- Edible garnishes

Meets Class Criteria - 15 marks

- Use of correct Ingredients/ % where requested
- Size of the piece
- Meets quantity of portions in brief
- Easily identifiable to meet the brief

Taste / Flavour / Preparation – 30 marks

- All flavours listed on menu are identifiable
- No overpowering flavours
- Correct and/or balance of textures
- Enjoyable eat factor

Workmanship / Execution /Presentation – 30 marks

- Skills shown in dish composition
- Well-cooked item
- Finishing of the dish to a high standard
- Even presentation of piece or pieces

Originality / Innovation – 15 marks

- Creative use of ingredients
- Balanced use of textures
- Clean and innovative presentation

Judging Criteria - non-tasted classes

First Impression – 15 marks

- Visual Impact
- Regular in shape and size
- Edible garnishes only
- Realistic looking garnish pieces

Meets Class Criteria - 20 marks

- Use of correct Ingredients/ % where requested
- Size of the piece meets criteria
- Meets quantity of portions in brief
- Easily identifiable to meet the brief
- No use of wire supports
- Single piece presented not multiple items

Workmanship / Execution / Presentation – 50 marks

- Skills shown in piece composition
- Finishing of the piece to a high standard
- Even presentation of piece or pieces
- Piping even and consistent
- Different types of garnishing used
- Balanced use of colours
- Realistic sizes of garnish pieces
- Well covered/coated piece

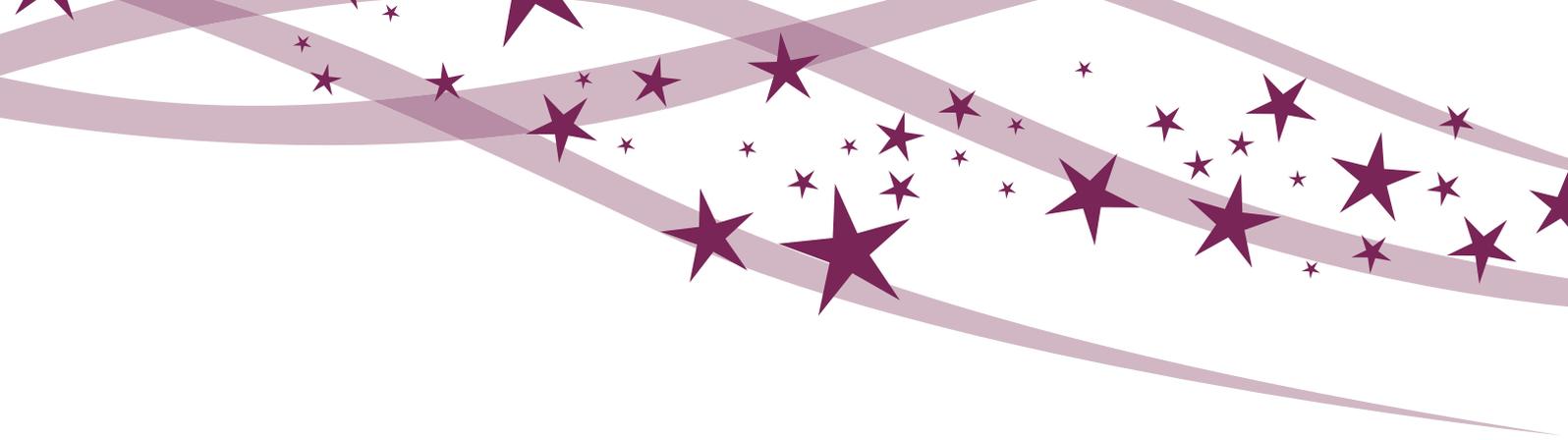
Originality / Innovation – 15 marks

- Look for new ideas
- Creative use of ingredients
- Clean and innovative presentation



Enter for Finishing Touches online
www.theschoolfoodpeople.co.uk/finishing-touches

Entry deadline is Friday 29th May 2026



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CULINARY TALENT

