

PORTFOLIO

DEVELOPING CULINARY SKILLS.

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Developing Culinary Skills (BMGM5002)

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I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.
I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence

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Introduction

This reflective portfolio outlines some of the learning activities and resulting skill acquisition that were achieved during professional practice in the culinary business. The purpose of this portfolio was to discuss the main competencies that were gained during the placement period and how these experiences aligned with my career goals. The aim of the assignment was to review and showcase instances where learned concepts were applied, with an emphasis on supply and stock management, appropriate meat cooking, and plating techniques. Each of these areas is further described, including the difficulties encountered, decisions made, and skills acquired throughout the process.

As a result, this portfolio goes beyond personal reflections; it represents key development milestones and serves as a tool for monitoring my progress toward future career steps in the culinary field. Based on my placement as a Kitchen Assistant at Llwyn Country House, this portfolio documents my learning and practical experiences in areas such as supply and stock management, meat cooking skills, and preparation and plating techniques. Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as a framework, the portfolio also provides structured reflections on challenges faced, lessons learned, and personal growth. This process supports a conscious awareness of both achievements and areas for improvement, aligning with my long-term aspiration to become a professional in the hospitality industry.

Supply and Stock Management

Supply and stock management is a vital activity for any organisation operating in the culinary environment, as it directly influences the quality of services provided and the internal organisation of the business (Parsa et al., 2015). During my placement, I became familiar with the importance of efficient ordering, stock usage, and proper handling—key components that contribute to a well-organised and systematic kitchen environment (Dittmer et al., 1993). The ability to control stock ensures that kitchen operations run smoothly, preventing situations where stock shortages or overstocking lead to waste and inefficiencies (The BC Cook Articulation Committee, 2025).

As stated earlier, there were instances during my placement when I had to ensure that stock levels were adequate to meet customer demand, while also avoiding overstocking that could lead to spoilage. I managed this by adopting a more systematic approach to ordering, particularly with items such as fresh vegetables, dairy products, and meats, which have shorter shelf lives. For example, I implemented a routine of placing smaller,

more frequent orders for chicken breast and double cream, rather than bulk buying, which helped reduce waste.

Additionally, I conducted regular stock checks and monitored usage patterns to better anticipate ingredient needs based on upcoming bookings and menus. This allowed me to use only the freshest available stock and reduce the likelihood of expired items being left unused. I also adapted to changes in storage systems, such as reorganising the walk-in fridge to ensure that perishable items like salmon and leafy greens were stored in optimal temperature zones, helping to extend their shelf life and maintain quality.

While going through these steps, I improved my organisational skills, particularly in stock rotation and maintaining clear labelling systems for perishable goods. For example, I introduced a 'first in, first out' (FIFO) method for dairy and meat products, which helped reduce waste and ensured items were used before their expiry dates. I also developed better time management skills by scheduling stock checks and order placements during quieter periods in the kitchen, avoiding disruption during peak service times.

In addition, I gained a deeper understanding of supply chain mechanics and how they impact both operational efficiency and waste reduction. For instance, I observed that ordering from local suppliers with shorter delivery lead times allowed us to minimise stockholding and reduce the risk of spoilage—key aspects of an efficient and sustainable kitchen (Parsa et al., 2015). These experiences highlighted how proactive inventory control contributes to smoother kitchen operations, and I now feel confident in applying these practices in future roles.

Meat Cooking Skills

One of my most valuable discoveries during the placement at Llwyn Country House was gaining hands-on experience with meat cooking techniques, which are essential in the culinary industry. I worked with methods such as grilling, stovetop cooking, and using advanced appliances like Rational ovens, salamanders, and the cook-chill-freeze system (Kang et al., 2022). Each technique required different procedures and a high level of precision to ensure that the meat was cooked to the correct core temperature and doneness level, which varies depending on the type of meat. For example, beef burgers needed to reach an internal temperature of at least 75°C to be safe for consumption, while still maintaining juiciness and a slightly firm texture. Chicken, on the other hand, had to be cooked thoroughly until no pinkness remained, ensuring a safe internal temperature of 74°C to avoid food-borne illness.

One challenge I faced was controlling heat and timing to achieve the desired texture. For instance, when grilling burgers, I had to constantly monitor the surface temperature and adjust the grilling time to avoid undercooked centres or a dry, overcooked exterior. When cooking on the stovetop, I learned the importance of preheating the pan and oil to the correct temperature to allow for even browning and the development of a rich, caramelised crust without burning. Using the Rational oven helped me to experiment with steam-assisted roasting, which retained moisture in pork joints while still achieving a crispy skin. The salamander grill allowed me to finish steaks with a seared top layer while keeping the interior tender and medium-rare. These methods provided better results in terms of both flavour and mouthfeel, creating dishes that were not only safe but also enjoyable for the customer.

I also gained a deeper understanding of safe food handling, especially for raw meat. I followed the cook-chill-freeze principle, which involved cooking meat to the appropriate internal temperature, rapidly chilling it within 90 minutes, and freezing it at -18°C or below. This process ensured food safety, maintained the meat's texture and flavour, and reduced unnecessary waste. I was also introduced to how meat moves through the supply chain—from sourcing, receiving deliveries, storage in cold rooms, preparation in hygienic zones, to final plating—reinforcing the importance of each step in maintaining quality.

Through this experience, I learned how different equipment and cooking methods are best matched with different types of meat. For example, lamb shoulder benefitted from slow roasting in a Rational oven, which broke down connective tissues to create a tender texture, while thin beef cuts like minute steaks were best cooked quickly under a salamander to avoid drying out. I also began to appreciate how the cooking method is influenced by the dish being prepared—such as using sous vide for chicken breast in fine dining due to its precision, or pan-frying for a rustic pub-style presentation. These practical experiences have greatly increased my confidence and competence in meat preparation—skills that cannot be acquired by reading cookbooks alone, but require real-world application and sensory awareness.

Preparation and Plating Skills

Throughout my practical placement at Llwyn Country House, I gained valuable experience in the preparation and presentation of dishes, which is a fundamental aspect of delivering high-quality meals. I was actively involved in preparing and plating dishes across various courses on the menu, including starters, main courses, and desserts (Sahak et al., 2022).

Working in the kitchen enabled me to understand how balance is achieved in a dish—both in flavour and appearance. For example, when preparing a starter of smoked salmon with dill cream, I had to balance the richness of the fish with the acidity of lemon and the freshness of micro-greens to ensure a harmonious combination of tastes and textures. Mastering the art of plating intricate meals while ensuring equal portioning and a visually appealing presentation was a significant learning challenge. I practised the preparation and presentation of a range of components, including sauces such as béarnaise, red wine reduction, and raspberry coulis. I also made custards like vanilla crème anglaise, ice creams including salted caramel and mint chocolate chip, and sorbets such as lemon and mango. These required careful attention to texture, consistency, and presentation. For example, serving lemon sorbet alongside raspberry coulis demanded precision in plating to avoid smearing or melting that could affect the dish's visual appeal.

I also learned how creative garnishing—using items like edible flowers, micro herbs, or citrus zest—can enhance the visual presentation while complementing the flavour profile of the dish. One example was decorating a vanilla panna cotta with a mint leaf and a drizzle of raspberry coulis to create contrast and heighten the dish's elegance.

Moreover, I became familiar with plating techniques such as using ring moulds for uniformity, sauce scribbling to add artistic flair, and layering ingredients to build visual appeal. For instance, when presenting a deconstructed apple crumble, I layered spiced apple compote, crumble topping, and cinnamon ice cream using a mould to create a structured, refined look. These skills improved my understanding of the importance of accuracy, timing, and consistency in professional food presentation (Darojatun et al., 2023).

I also learned to adapt the plating style according to the nature of the dish and customer expectations. While a rustic beef stew might be presented in a deep bowl for comfort and warmth, a fine-dining lamb loin dish required careful slicing, stacking, and symmetrical arrangement of vegetables and sauces. This adaptability has sharpened my ability to deliver dishes that are not only flavourful but also visually enticing, giving me a strong foundation in the aesthetic principles of culinary arts.

Reflections on Experience

This placement has significantly changed the way I view the culinary industry as well as my personal development. Initially, I perceived the field as being purely based on technical knowledge and the ability to perform kitchen tasks; however, I soon realised that success in the kitchen requires strong organisational skills, effective teamwork, and

adaptability (Foley, 2020). The dynamic and high-pressure environment, particularly during peak service times, highlighted the importance of professionalism and reliability. For example, during a wedding event hosted at Llwyn Country House, we faced intense time pressures, and I learned the necessity of maintaining composure, efficiently communicating with the team, and prioritising tasks to ensure timely service without compromising food quality.

One of the most profound lessons I gained was recognising that every aspect of culinary work—from stock management cooking techniques and plating—requires precise attention to detail. I encountered several challenges, such as ensuring exact cooking times for meats to achieve the correct doneness, accurately ordering stock to meet fluctuating guest numbers without causing waste, and maintaining consistent quality even when the kitchen was operating at full capacity during busy lunch services. These experiences taught me to think strategically, plan ahead, and adapt quickly when unexpected situations arose, such as last-minute menu changes or supplier delays. Moreover, my perception of the kitchen environment shifted; previously, I saw the kitchen purely as a workspace. Through my experience, I came to understand that effective collaboration and communication between chefs, kitchen assistants, and front-of-house staff are vital to ensuring smooth service and customer satisfaction. For instance, coordinating closely with the Head Chef and the pastry team during large bookings taught me the importance of synchronising timing and maintaining open communication channels.

Working in such a competitive and fast-paced establishment also contributed significantly to my psychological growth. I learned to manage stress effectively, remain focused during high-pressure situations, and accept constructive feedback without taking it personally. For example, when mistakes were made during food preparation under pressure, I was encouraged to reflect on them constructively rather than dwell on the errors, promoting continuous improvement.

In conclusion, this placement has been a transformative experience. It has not only enhanced my technical culinary skills but also strengthened my understanding of the soft skills essential to succeeding in the industry. The insights I have gained will undoubtedly prove invaluable for my future career, particularly in managing and training kitchen teams, and in building a professional, efficient, and resilient workplace environment.

Leading to the Future

This theory supports the idea that valuable lessons about one's future career can be obtained through a professional placement. By learning about supply management, various cooking methods, and plating techniques, I have established a strong foundation which will help me to build the career I aspire to. Besides enhancing my practical skills, exposure to different aspects of kitchen operations has been immensely valuable in helping me understand how a professional kitchen functions—knowledge that is absolutely crucial for my development as an aspiring chef.

My main career objective is to become a Head Chef or culinary business manager in the future. Learning the intricacies of stock management and the supply chain, alongside improving my ability to cook and plate meats to a professional standard, has strengthened my understanding of what is expected from someone leading a kitchen team. Furthermore, my placement experience highlighted the importance of team leadership and effective communication in facilitating smooth service and high-quality customer experiences. These leadership and organisational skills will undoubtedly be crucial when I eventually assume a managerial position.

Looking ahead, my future goals include improving my technical skills in pastry making and mastering more complex plate presentations. Additionally, gaining managerial experience—including managing people, food supplies, resources, and time—will be vital to supporting my career progression. I recognise that there are still several areas requiring my attention as I continue to grow professionally; for instance, I need to deepen my knowledge of modern kitchen technologies and explore advanced kitchen management strategies. These areas will form key components of my professional development plan. In conclusion, the experiences and skills I have gained during my placement have energised me and provided clear direction for achieving my career aspirations. I am now even more determined to progress within the culinary arts industry and to strive towards becoming a leader in the field.

Conclusion

To conclude, this reflective portfolio has evaluated a wide range of learning experiences and skills gained during my placement. I have developed essential competencies in areas such as supply and stock control, various meat cooking techniques, and plating arrangements. These experiences have not only enhanced my technical abilities but also broadened my understanding of how crucial it is for kitchen processes to be well-

organised, efficient, and interconnected, especially in a fast-paced and high-pressure environment.

During the placement, I encountered several challenges that required me to exercise problem-solving and demonstrate flexibility. I learned that thorough preparation and close attention to detail are vital to producing high-quality outcomes in the kitchen. In addition, the experience has highlighted the critical role of teamwork and clear communication in ensuring smooth and professional service delivery.

The skills and knowledge I have acquired will undoubtedly support me in my future career in the culinary industry. With each new technical and leadership experience, I feel more capable of facing professional challenges and taking on greater responsibilities.

Reflecting on this process has allowed me to assess my progress thoughtfully, and I now feel more confident and prepared to apply what I have learned in future roles within the hospitality sector.

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