THE PEOPLE *behind the* BRITISH HOSPITALITY

FEA Foodservice Equipment Association

Information Involvement Influence



John Cunningham

People. Standards. A stronger future for hospitality.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE - FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT ASSOCIATION

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THE STORY BEGINS HERE

Why I invited John Cunningham

When we think about hospitality, we often think of chefs, restaurants and hotels. But behind every successful kitchen is an entire industry of people, technology and innovation that rarely gets the recognition it deserves.

That is exactly why I invited John Cunningham from the Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA) to join me for this interview.

What particularly caught my attention was his commitment to inspiring the next generation through the Next Gen initiative, connecting young people with career opportunities they may never have considered.

For me, John's story reflects what this interview series is all about: discovering the people behind hospitality, sharing their passion and making the industry's hidden opportunities visible.



George Kanis

TALENT & OPPORTUNITY

Why Next Gen matters

Making a largely unseen sector visible to the next generation.

George: When you spoke to FEA members, what challenge came up again and again?

John: Recruiting and retaining talent. Many young people know about working in a restaurant or becoming a chef, but very few realise there is an entire industry behind professional kitchens - including engineering, manufacturing, design and servicing equipment.

George: So what is the purpose of Next Gen?

John: We want young people to see the opportunities. The commercial kitchen equipment sector is entrepreneurial, exciting and full of career possibilities, but first people need to know it exists. That is why we have been taking this story to schools, colleges and universities.

"We need an initiative to give young people visibility of our industry."



18 November 2026 · Staverton Park Hotel, Daventry
The FEA pairs a career masterclass with a practical look at technology and regulation in foodservice equipment.

DISCOVER NEW CAREERS

Take the story to schools

Career guidance, short videos and first-hand conversations.

EDUCATION / INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

George: How do you introduce these careers to students who may never have heard of the sector?

John: By meeting young people directly at career events and working with education providers. We also partnered with Unifrog, the careers guidance platform used by many UK schools and colleges, to create videos explaining the jobs and opportunities available.

George: Why combine online information with in-person contact?

John: A video can show what a career looks like, but conversations make it real. We want young people to meet those already working in our industry and understand the variety of routes they could follow.



MENTORING & LEADERSHIP

Mentoring future leaders

A long-term investment in people who are already building their careers.

George: Is Next Gen just about encouraging students to consider a career?

John: No. We also want to support young people who are already part of the industry. Next Gen includes networking, training and a mentoring programme that connects people with experienced colleagues.

George: I recognise the value of that. If I had had a good mentor when I sold my first bar, I might have made different decisions. What difference can mentoring make?

John: That is exactly the kind of support we want Next Gen to deliver. Experience and encouragement can help young professionals build confidence, develop their networks and become the next generation of leaders.

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

01
CONNECT
Meet peers and industry experts

02
LEARN
Build practical sector knowledge

03
GROW
Develop confidence and leadership

"They are the future leaders."

FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT

A career behind every kitchen

The equipment sector offers far more than most young people imagine.

George: When I first saw that the FEA had around 200 members, I thought that sounded small. What does membership actually cover?

John: Our members include manufacturers, distributors, dealers, maintenance and service companies, sales agents and kitchen designers. Some are major international businesses. Together they span the entire supply chain for professional kitchens.

George: Does that mean the industry extends beyond restaurants and hotels?

John: Absolutely. Think about hospitals, schools, prisons and any place where a meal is served away from home. The sector covers ovens, fridges and dishwashers, but also cutlery, crockery and everything in between.

PATHWAYS WORTH DISCOVERING

01

ENGINEERING

Technical solutions and servicing

02

KITCHEN DESIGN

Planning practical foodservice spaces

03

PRODUCT & SALES

Equipment and customer solutions

04

OPERATIONS

Keeping professional kitchens running

TECHNOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY

The future kitchen

Automation can make work more efficient without losing the human touch.

George: I saw a robot making cappuccino during a stopover in China. How far has robotics come in hospitality?

John: Robots have been around for some time. In Japan, they are already used for tasks such as transporting dishes back to the washing area. They are less common in the UK, but I expect that to change.

George: Could this also help operators with staff shortages and the workload in kitchens?

John: Yes. Think about automated fryers and other equipment that can take on repetitive tasks. People will still be central to hospitality, because the experience and the interaction with guests matter enormously.

George: And what role does sustainability play when new equipment is developed?

John: A major one. We need to consider energy use, materials, refrigerants and the full lifetime of equipment. Improved compressors and insulation can make modern refrigeration considerably more energy-efficient than older models.

> *"Hospitality is fundamentally about the experience."*
>
> JOHN CUNNINGHAM / ON THE HUMAN ROLE IN HOSPITALITY



THE FINAL WORD

Have a go. Get stuck in.

John's advice for the next generation

George: *"If there was one message you would want to convey to current and future people working in the industry, what would it be?"*

John: *"If you're not really sure of yourself, have a go! Get stuck in, try some things, don't be afraid to try or be creative, don't feel constrained."*



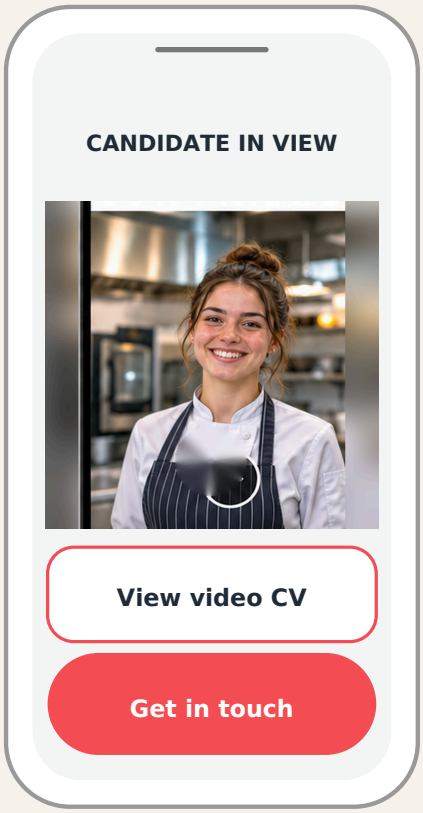
ABOUT CatchJobs

CatchJobs connects hospitality employers with people through short, personal video profiles. Instead of relying on a traditional CV alone, candidates can show their personality, experience and motivation. Employers can discover the person behind the application, make more informed connections and bring a more human approach to recruitment.

BEHIND THE SERIES

People shape hospitality.

That is why personality, experience and potential deserve to be seen before the first interview.



WHAT WE DO

CatchJobs gives hospitality employers a platform to view candidate profiles and video CVs, and connect directly. Candidates share their experience, motivation and personality on video.

WHY

A video CV offers an initial impression of how a person presents themselves and communicates. Employers combine this with qualifications, experience and personal conversations.

HOW

Employers view profiles and contact candidates. Candidates introduce themselves through short videos. CatchJobs provides the platform; employer and candidate make the decision.

FEATURED ASSOCIATION

FEA Foodservice Equipment Association
Information Involvement Influence

FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT ASSOCIATION

JOHN CUNNINGHAM
Chief Executive

ABOUT THE FEA

The Foodservice Equipment Association supports the UK commercial kitchen equipment industry through advocacy, professional development, technical information and international connections.

CONTACT

Rotherwick House, 3 Thomas More Street
St. Katharine Docks, London E1W 1YZ

www.fea.org.uk
enquiries@fea.org.uk