



Trade news, insight and comment from the Beverage Standards Association

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Trade slower, but expected to revive

Market conditions have slowed down the rate at which new cafes have opened – but many report business went up over the last year.

The BSA has welcomed the realistic warning given in the latest Allegra report on the cafe sector. For the first time that we can recall, this annual coffee trade report has spoken of something other than headlong growth in the coffee-shop sector – the 2020 publication suggests that while British cafes have maintained positive sales, the growth in the number of outlets has 'stalled'.

According to Allegra, the UK now has very nearly 26,000 coffee shops. Growth in cafe numbers has been under two per cent, and the 'branded coffee shop segment', a phrase created by Allegra many years ago, grew by less than one per cent, around seventy new stores. However, sales in that sector did show noticeable growth, up by 4.2 per cent to what is reckoned to be £4.5 billion.

Unsurprisingly, Allegra comments that "outlet growth slowed significantly amid challenging market conditions," and refers to industry doubts over the costs of property and labour and the impact of Brexit. Beside this, it is reported that the main three operational concerns facing coffee business managers are environmental concerns, plastic packaging, and 'greater supply chain transparency'.

In spite of all this, Allegra says that forty per cent of industry bosses reported business up more than five per cent in 2019; this is a better performance than Allegra reported for 2018.

Equally unsurprisingly, Allegra suggests that "high operations costs and reduced footfall are compelling many branded coffee chains to raise quality, diversify menus and focus on customer retention over outlet expansion." Branded operators are expected to launch new formats such as kiosks and drive-thrus, and maybe diversify using specialist sub-brands.

BSA chairman Steve Slark says he agrees with Allegra. "I believe that whilst coffee as a trade / commodity is doing well, we have probably nearly reached saturation point in outlets. Thus the refinement now begins in the charge for ever more exciting menus and diversification, and quality and repeat business become primary drivers where there are many outlets within close proximity.

"Unless there is a complete rethink on high street strategies it is hard to see where any growth in outlets may be situated except in the convenience drive-through style of locations."

Overall, says Allegra's Jeffrey Young, the British coffee shop market has held up well in tough conditions, and that 'outlet growth' may regain momentum in the next two or three years.



The phenomenon of 'barista wrist' is well known – it is an RSI-type injury which comes from one or more of the movements required when tamping coffee and twisting a portafilter into place in the espresso machine.

La Marzocco, which introduced a machine featuring an 'Ergonomic Portafilter' design last year, now says that early users of the machine confirm that the new design can "noticeably mitigate the repetitive stress injuries occurring through its ease of action".

This new development is the Straight-In Portafilter — the barista slides it directly forward and then upward to lock, rather than twisting it in horizontally. La Marzocco says this is better for the wrist, and also saves time.

In one explanation we have seen from Italy, we also read the interesting information that: "no loose portafilters when brewing; barista cannot accidentally waste coffee due to poor insertion of the group handle into the group head.

"The straight-in portafilter system prevents brewing under a scenario where things are not properly inserted, and prevents aggression from baristas ever being a quality control issue. No accidental spitting and less impact due to stressed out work."

The spitting they talk about is of course from a badly-fitted portafilter!



This comment from the heyday of coffee-house rises was seen outside Street Coffee in Bermondsey!

Health experts query dairy-free milks and detox teas

There has been a fascinating response in the USA to Starbucks' new menu addition of three dairy-free coffee drinks, the almond milk honey flat white, the coconut milk latte, and the oat milk honey latte. Nutritionists, dieticians and health specialists have pointed out that while plant-based options are usually highlighted as 'healthy options', dairy-free milks are often higher in added sugar.

The 'health halo' is just not justified, one nutrition adviser told the American press. "Almonds and oats are different from almond milk and oat milk," he said. "These milks have significantly more sugar than the standard dairy milk equivalent, but there's no additional health benefits to having a drink with one of these plant-based milks unless you have a dairy allergy."

Non-dairy milks can be considered environmentally friendly, said another consultant and 'wellness expert'. "However, when you replace naturally unsweetened dairy with a high-sugar, plant-based alternative, you might be doing the planet a favour, but you aren't doing your body any favours." The equivalent sugar in the oatmilk honey latte, she said, was the same as six mini Krispy Kreme glazed doughnuts.

A third nutritionist quoted in the American press said that while these drinks do contain protein, they are mostly sugar and fat calories. A fourth specialist said: "It's important that you eat your calories - not drink them."

Meanwhile, in Britain, Costa has introduced a pink hot chocolate. It features ruby chocolate, which is naturally pink and has an intense fruity taste; it has been known of for some time, but came in for some big development by Barry Callebaut, among others, and later cropped up in Nestle KitKat bars.

We can also expect protests from several tea brands to a recent BBC report concerning 'healthy' teas - 'detox' teas are not a quick fix, said a medical director from the NHS, adding that products claiming 'detox' qualities can have side-effects, including diarrhoea and heart issues. The British Dietetic Association said that the concept of 'detox' products is 'nonsense', in that the body has its own built-in system to detoxify and remove waste: 'there are no pills or specific drinks that can do a magic detoxifying job', it reported.

However, tea and coffee can slim you down, according to research from the University of Illinois. It said that caffeine-containing beverages aid weight loss and cholesterol control by blunting the effects of a diet high in sugars and fats. The study involved rats being fed an unhealthy diet, and then being given tea to drink - they dropped a significant amount of body fat and weight gain slowed down. This can be scaled up to humans, suggested the report.

Bet you haven't seen one of these before! Yes, it's an umbrella - but look at the handle. It has a built-in cup holder which, we are told, is 'specifically designed to hold your coffee cup in place as you brave the rain'. You can find it on Amazon for about £30.



Among the recent horror of the Australian bush fires, there has been a heartwarming café story. The owner of the Wharfside Café at Snug Cove stayed open even as embers and ash rained down, says the Australian press. She defied an evacuation order, saying that in the event of the fire encroaching on her town, the café would be open for anyone seeking refuge, and she also stayed open to support the emergency services. The family-run café stayed open and gave shelter during the bushfire crisis until it was finally forced to close when it ran out of water. "We stayed because there were still people that had to stay behind," she said, "and there are animals that wouldn't have been able to be properly evacuated." Asked what would happen if fire reached the café, she replied calmly that her staff would leave by the back door and jump into the harbour.

In the UK, some cafes showed generosity during the Christmas period – typically, the Hideout coffee and doughnut shop in Portsmouth opened for three hours on Christmas day, giving free coffees to people who, for whatever reason, had nowhere else to go. The manager said: "we decided that Christmas is a hard time of year for some people, so it would be a nice thing if we were there with the machine on, for anyone feeling down."

Hundreds of applications have been received for the summer job of managing a coffee shop on a remote island, a mile off the south-west coast of Ireland. This is Kerry Great Blasket Island, which is now uninhabited, but which attracts many visitors during the tourist season, partly because three of Ireland's greatest poets lived there. The island's owner has said that the venue is 'a sort of off-the-grid glamping experience', in that it has no electricity, no wi-fi, no hot water supply... it's fires, candles, stoves, wildlife, nature. And it's beautiful, idyllic." The successful café manager will have to charge electronic items using a wind turbine attached to a car battery.

Doing the un-doable with coffee

A new coffee-and-chocolate product which says it has 'done the undo-able' has been given a 'best new food product' award by the Speciality Coffee Association in America. The product is Nudge, a kind of chocolate-coffee bar.

According to the American patent, the process involves combining fine-ground roasted coffee beans with cocoa butter. When this is 'tempered' by cooling and reheating, it creates a 'dark, aromatic whole coffee matter' which can be formed into edible bars or spreads. The main feature of it, says the maker, is that it retains the flavour attributes of the coffee beans involved. In an American interview, the maker explained that for various reasons, only a small amount of the flavour potential of a coffee bean makes it into a coffee drink; most of the flavours are not water-soluble. Equally, he said, if you mash up a coffee bean and eat it, you still don't get all the flavour because of the size of the particles. But by working the coffee bean into miniscule pieces and treating it as a chocolate, the full flavours come through.



The concept of 'edible coffee', says the manufacturer, will soon be recognised as a new food category.

The latest attempt to serve coffee in edible cups has been tested by Air New Zealand. The airline has said that it uses 29 million plastic cups a year. In October, the airline introduced plant-based coffee cups, and then on a few flights, tested edible biscotti coffee cups. The problem is that the company which produced the edible cups is a small family business, and although it already supplies many cafes in New Zealand, making millions for the airline is probably impossible.



Edible cups being served in-flight

Apparently the cups work well - the manufacturer has said "the cup will stay crispy until after you finish your coffee; it will not break with the coffee. You can have hot water in there for 24 hours and it won't break or split - it might be a bit flexible and you might be able to push the sides in a bit, but the cup won't actually break. And it tastes really nice, like a vanilla biscotti."

The craze for vegan food has now hit the major coffee chains. Costa has announced its vegan cheese and 'ham' toastie, made of Quorn, and what is bizarrely described as 'freshly toasted' bread – do they think customers would tolerate cold pre-toasted bread?

Greggs has created vegan 'steak' bakes to follow its vegan sausage roll. Caffè Nero has become the first coffee shop brand to sell vegan croissants - they are made the same way as butter croissants, but with 'a combination of natural oils'. Among the extremely odd press material issued in support of the vegan month of 'Veganuary' is the information that 'Nero's new vegan sausage roll for £3.45 is inspired by their port and pancetta sausage roll, which sells at a rate of one every three seconds'.

They will almost catch up with the rise of the vegan population, because the Veganuary campaign has said that people have been pledging to go vegan at the rate of one every six seconds.



The Washington Post has come up with the fascinating discovery that the Muppets were originally created to sell coffee. Although the series which made them famous, Sesame Street, is only around fifty years old, the original puppets appeared in adverts for Wilkins Coffee on American television in 1954.

Puppet master Jim Henson had just created the Kermit the Frog character from an old felt coat belonging to his mother, when the coffee brand invited him to make a series of eight-second ads.

The Muppets went on to appear in 179 commercials for Wilkins Coffee, and were given much of the credit for a 300 per cent increase in the home sales of its coffee. In 1958, 25,000 pairs of Muppet puppets were sold.

But there was something odd about this... Jim Henson didn't like coffee at all!

The TV series Friends, which was set in a New York coffee-house, lasted for ten series - and every episode can now be seen in a Friends-inspired cafe in London. The Friends House in Islington, North London, plays episodes of the comedy all day long.

An East Belfast cafe has reacted graciously to the Christmas theft of the lavender pots and flowers that adorned the front of its building. Instead of being angry, the owners posted a message online which said 'if you like lavender plants, don't steal them - come in and ask, and we'll share some with you.'

Also at Christmas, the pop-up Barky Blinders Cafe opened in Birmingham, inviting dog owners to bring their pets along, dressed up for Christmas... to meet Santa Paws.



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Are you operating sustainably?

Does it matter? And if it does, whose responsibility is it – the beverage operator or his supplier?

The hot beverage trade believes that 'sustainability' is a top priority for their business, and that their customers want to see evidence of it – but very few are doing anything practical about it. This is one conclusion of a thought-provoking new 'toolkit' report by Brita, a BSA member company who specialise in water-filtration.

The company surveyed five hundred decision-makers or 'influencers' in the hot-beverage trade, to assess their views on the importance of 'sustainability' in business.

The results show that some of these beverage operators are apparently being fairly active – eight out of ten hot beverage businesses have introduced methods to reduce single-use plastics; three quarters have removed plastic straws, and two-thirds have eliminated single-use plastic cutlery. A quarter think that emphasis should be placed on disposal of tea and coffee grounds, although though they don't know how, or who, is going to do it.

But less than half have introduced incentives to reduce single-use coffee cups, and although over half of the respondents see the energy-efficiency of equipment as a top focus, under half of them are using water filters.

Candidly, and Brita puts it rather more tactfully than this, the clear inference is that beverage operators think it is good to be seen as 'sustainable', but they really want their suppliers to do the work for them.

"Sustainability in the coffee sector isn't a new concept – what is new is the significant shift in consumers' expectations," says Brita's managing director Sarah Taylor. "Once viewed as a 'nice to have', putting the environment before profit is now expected, and this goes beyond the likes of recycling packaging and removing single-use plastic straws.

"It's clear that the role of suppliers is key in helping individual businesses and the wider industry achieve sustainability targets."

In the body of the report, there are some findings which are as expected, and some which may appear rather odd.

Hot beverage operators complain that there are a number of barriers to reaching their sustainable goals: around half of them acknowledge that they themselves just don't know enough about good sustainable practices.

Rather more oddly, 64 per cent of them say they find it difficult to balance profitability and sustainability within their business. The reason for this is not explained, and when we pressed Brita on the subject, they said they were not much the wiser, but had simply observed from the responses that "implementing sustainable initiatives or investing in new sustainable products or services can be perceived as having a higher cost attached to it."

If beverage operators need suppliers' help, then exactly what do they need help with?



The Brita report

The top sustainable initiatives coffee operators would like suppliers to focus on are: reducing packaging, sourcing sustainable food, and 'working on machine protection to help it stand the test of time'.

This last point is reported as being something which concerns 51 per cent of respondents. The Brita toolkit says that almost half of respondents think their equipment is letting them down by 'not standing the test of time' and that '49 per cent believe that if their equipment could stand the test of time, it would make it a lot easier for them to meet their sustainability goals'.

This has not gone down entirely well with machine suppliers.

There is a suggestion that these were 'prompted' questions – that is, the researchers offer a question and invite respondents to agree with it, and it is certainly extremely unlikely that the phrase 'stand the test of time' was actually spoken by several respondents. But why is the onus being put on suppliers? Are operators blaming equipment manufacturers for machines not lasting longer?

Or does the research suggest that the reason some equipment does not last is because the operators themselves are failing to protect and maintain equipment properly... typically, in the matter of water softeners, Brita's own primary interest?

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The machine makers were robust in their responses, and several makers argued that their machines certainly do 'stand the test of time'.

At Fracino, another BSA member, marketing head Peter Atmore told us: "the accusation is not irrefutable in some cases of build quality – some equipment quality coming out of Europe, or probably their Far East factories, might support the argument.

"But it certainly doesn't apply to Fracino. We take durability seriously, and can show machines of 22 years old, still in fully active service, making over 1,200 cups per day."

From the Brew-it Group, also a BSA member, Angus McKenzie made a similar response: "what really kills a machine has not changed – it's lack of cleaning and scale-related issues. I know of ten-year-old machines still working like new in the field, because they have enjoyed good care.

"Following a regular servicing route may appear expensive, but typically it maximises uptime and extends machine life. If Brita are stimulating a debate that speeds up focus on this, it could be a good thing."

By far the most detailed response came from Drewry Pearson, chief executive of Marco Beverage Systems of Dublin, the specialist in what used to be called 'water boilers' and more recently the pioneer of variable-temperature counter-top dispense.

He told us : "I can identify several points in defence of the reliability of coffee machines and 'very hot water dispense equipment'.

"One is the environment in which they operate – water, heat and electricity are unhappy bedfellows because hot water becomes steam, and steam stops electronics from working. Very few components are made to operate in an environment as harsh as a coffee machine; much of the secret of a reliable product is knowing which components can operate reliably in such an environment.

"Another is water, which can be both too hard or too soft. Hard water scales up the boilers leading to element burn-out; this is a location issue, not a machine fault. Soft water can be much more harmful to equipment than hard water; soft water can be so pure that electronic sensors cease to operate. If water is 'too pure', it can suck the minerals out of the metal in the tank and lead to corrosion and leaking. This can happen with reverse osmosis equipment, where all the minerals are removed from the water, and none are later replaced."

In a remark which will please the report's sponsor company, he added: "the point here is to take advice from a knowledgeable filter manufacturer so that the water filtration system matches the water to both the equipment and to the beverage."

"What kills a machine has not changed - it's lack of cleaning and scale-related issues"

- the Brew-It Group

"Professional catering equipment is in continual operation a minimum of eight hours a day, often twice that – I think people often forget this"

- Drewry Pearson, Marco

Further, added Drewry Pearson, the most modern bean-to-cup machines are particularly complex pieces of equipment. He calls these machines 'barista robots', and notes that apart from all the other hazards, they control milk, which hardens and blocks tubes.

For machines to 'stand the test of time', there is a balance to be achieved, he says:

"Filter coffee machines and traditional espresso machines do last upwards of ten years if treated carefully, but super-automatics tend to have a life of about five years, before the maintenance costs outweigh the cost of a replacement. However, in those five years a super-automatic will have saved labour costs and created income at a profit level higher than any other piece of equipment.

"Super-automatics absolutely require daily cleaning routines. In general, expect annual maintenance cost to be about twenty per cent of the original machine cost... the operator ignores this maintenance at their peril."

Blaming machine makers is not necessarily the answer, said Drewry Pearson.

"Clients want more and more functionality from the equipment that they purchase. In times past, where coffee machines were much more simple and manually operated, they did tend to be more reliable and last longer.

"Professional catering equipment is in continual operation a minimum of eight hours a day, often twice that – I think people often forget this, and in terms of life expectancy and reliability one tends to get what one pays for.

"You cannot expect a VW Polo to travel reliably the same number of miles as a VW Passat... but in the coffee business, many operators tend to think they can!"

Rather in support of the Brita interest in water filtration, Angus McKenzie added: "many espresso machines can be programmed to alert customers when a filter change is due. This programming should be done at installation – but I suspect often it is not. In my view, all water filters should be supplied with digital water meters, reporting their life left at least weekly. There must be an obligation

to explain these things fully at the point of install."

The three-time barista champion Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood, who wrote the definitive book on water quality and coffee, has recently said that the trade changes filters in too haphazard a way:

"Traditionally, we have had a rudimentary approach to water filtration - based on the amount of water we think we're going to use and the number of coffees we'll make, we set a date to change and renew. The problem is, you

Continued...

won't know precisely the day when your filter stops working well. You find out too late, when the coffee already starts to taste flat and uninteresting." (Maxwell's interest is in endorsing the Hydracs early-warning system).

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In another unexpected finding, the Brita research suggests that 46 per cent of beverage operators said "sourcing sustainable coffee beans is an initiative that operators would like suppliers to focus on". This is rather a shocker – there are around 400 coffee roasters in the UK, the majority of whom have been shouting loudly about their 'sustainable' credentials, and forty-six per cent of professional buyers can not have missed this.

Something just does not fit here – either the researcher has made an incorrect assumption, by asking a leading 'prompted' question, or nearly half of beverage operators have been sourcing their coffee supplies with their eyes shut. Or, perhaps, some roasters and suppliers are not telling the entire truth about their products.

When we asked several suppliers, there was indeed some doubt about claims of sustainability.

At Cafedirect, whose whole image and business model relies on the concept of sustainability for coffee farmers to continue making a living, chief executive John Steel gave us a strong but courteously-worded opinion: "The answer may lie in what Brita's question defined as 'sustainable coffee beans', or in the claims each coffee roaster is making. If 'sustainability' means paying a fair price irrespective of the NYSE price, investing in projects at origin to tackle climate change, gender imbalance, the role of young people on the farm, education and health care and engaging with producers to ensure a lasting, deep change in behaviour... then there are very few being 'sustainable'."

A very well-known artisan roaster, who opted to stay anonymous, but who was one of the very first to go out and work directly with farmers, was less reticent: "I'm suspicious of responses saying that operators want suppliers to focus on sustainability – someone has to be willing to support the costs of such initiatives, but nobody really seems to do so. Don't get me started on the 400 or so roasters all claiming that they have sustainable policies in place!"

At Miko, a BSA member and very active company in such support for farmers, Andy Orchard suggested that all beverage operators are not as passionate about sustainability as they might say they are: "some operators might indeed want their coffee suppliers to be more sustainable in their sourcing, but from my experience price still too often dictates the day – appeasing growth and profitability figures sadly appears to remain their real priority, with sustainability claims simply a box-ticking exercise... they are figures-led, not heart-led!"

Perhaps mischievously, he wondered whether it was wishful thinking to hope that those 46 per cent of respondents really are ethically-conscious buyers who truly believe that sourcing sustainable coffee beans means more than slapping a few certifications on the side of a bag... and if so, that they are of course willing to pay more for real sustainability!

An experienced coffee buyer who never holds back on his opinions, and who supplies many of the large and small roasters in the UK, is Steve Hurst of Mercanta. His reaction was typically strong.

"The definition of 'sustainable' can be argued over and debated endlessly. Mercanta's ethical credentials are amongst the most robust and durable in the coffee industry – for many years, we have never paid less than US\$1.80/lb for arabica coffee purchases at origin. This price was established by taking a very generous US\$1.50/lb global production cost for specialty arabica coffee and adding twenty per cent to that number. We also track our purchases every year and pay well in excess of our stated minimum across the board."

“... there may be very few coffee suppliers being ‘sustainable’”

- John Steel, Cafedirect

And yet, he noted, "a glance at many competitors' offer sheets offers ample proof of market-driven unsustainable purchases actively taken up by parts of the roasting industry. Some roasters invent reasons to justify low priced, clearly unsustainable purchases."

With almost the same mischief as Andy Orchard, Steve Hurst noted that he has never seen a single pack of coffee from these roasters labelled 'unsustainably purchased'. There are several more general puzzles in the Brita research which are worth thinking about. Typically, 73 per cent of operators say the biggest influence on sustainable practices is customer demand – but they do not say how their customers are expressing this demand. If operators were more clear about this, their suppliers might know better how to respond with help.

A copy of the report Life is Better Filtered: School of Expertise - Serving Coffee Sustainably toolkit, can be downloaded from <https://www.brita.co.uk/hospitality>

Brita is not alone in reporting strange attitudes to sustainability among beverage-serving operators. Irish Rail has come in for some derision in the international press over its attitude to reusable cups – while many coffee houses now like customers to bring their own cups, the rail company does not, claiming that some sizes do not fit under their spouts, and that closing mechanisms can vary, causing a risk of burning to staff.

And yet, quite remarkably, some passengers have written to the press reporting that Irish Rail staff did fill reusable cups – but only after first pouring the tea or coffee into disposable cups, for decanting into the reusable ones. One passenger wrote: "I watched incredulously as the assistant made a coffee in the disposable cup, poured it into my reusable one and then binned the disposable cup. It's beyond barmy."

The appeal of being 'more than just a cafe'

I have always been a great fan of 'events', by which I mean things which will attract attention to your business. You can't just open up a café and hope people will walk in, but if you give them a reason to come through your door, then you've won half of the battle.

So I was particularly pleased to see the launch of the Leaky Teacup in Retford. They opened up a few days before Christmas, though I suppose they didn't celebrate that – because this is a pagan tea room.

The owners say that as well as hosting pagan events, they want to make the café a community hub; in case you're wondering, pagans worship Nature and many deities, and are generally quite a tolerant bunch.

Among the events the new cafe is hosting are pagan 'moots', board game nights, and an evening with the local ghosthunters. The tearoom is opened by a veteran of the armed services who is a tea fan, and on his menu are such items as nettle tea and dandelion tea (£1.50 each).

I'm not surprised that a wide variety of hospitality outlets already cater for meetings of 'alternative faiths', including one of my favourite coffee houses on the Dorset coast. There is also, I am delighted to see, a website giving advice for pubs and cafes who want to cater for such events

This is all good attention-getting and business-building stuff. Several cafés I know of hold regular Christian services – indeed, Costa became popular for being so welcoming to local churches. Can you see the potential? As the website of one community church asks: 'how much more comfortable can you get than sipping a chai in church?'

And I have always enjoyed the sheer variety of themes that cafes can work with. Just look at what happened when places like Look Mum, No Hands, pioneered the idea of the cycle café – bike cafes appeared all over the country.



Inspiring words from the Leaky Teapot...

These of course are slightly different from bikers' cafes, which are a different thing entirely. The daddy of those is the Ace Café on the North Circular in London, where, in the heyday of rock'n'roll, bikers would drop a coin in the juke-box and race on their bikes down to the Hanger Lane roundabout, to get back before the song finished. They didn't all make it – café boss Mark Wilsmore once told me "it was a recipe for carnage.." And I have always enjoyed the fact that a mug of tea in the Ace is a pound, whereas a cappuccino is £3... that's a biker attitude for you!

In a rather more genteel way, I always like seeing cafes host meetings of the Red Hat Society. This is a truly massive international fellowship of women of a certain age, inspired by the late Jenny Joseph, who wrote the poem that begins: 'when I am an old woman I shall wear purple, with a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me...'

There are 50,000 members across the world, there are a hundred chapters in the UK, and one of their favourite regular meeting times is for afternoon tea... if you can't see the business potential instantly, I despair.

(One of the later lines in Jenny's poem is: 'I shall pick the flowers in other people's gardens... and learn to spit'. Don't worry, they're a well-behaved lot!)

The number of board-game cafes has shot up, and this really is big

business; retail sales of board games in general were up about twenty per cent recently. It's inexpensive to set up, in that you just need a few tables, a good selection of board games, and a decent food and drink menu.

I think there's about a dozen such places in London, there's a big games café in Sheffield that offers 500 games to choose from. and one in the Newcastle area raised £8,000 on Kickstarter to fund its opening in November (their menu includes Copenhagen Fog tea, which I've not seen before... English Breakfast, milk, vanilla syrup and cinnamon).

Some board-game cafés are for kids, but the majority are for adults, and not just for dedicated gamers – there is a massive customer base of 'normal' folks who just come in for an hour or two and buy coffee and snacks while sitting down to Monopoly or Risk, or something. Some of these places have a cover charge of a fiver for players.

To be fair, board game cafes aren't a solid guarantee of business success; one of the favourite London ones closed down suddenly a few weeks ago. But a lot of them are doing very well, as are many venues of all kinds who have turned themselves into something more than 'just a café'.

I wish you all a successful 2020.

- Steve Slark, Chairman

Staffing crisis? What staffing crisis?

The hospitality trade is reported to be heading for a staffing shortage – but barista training courses have reported an increase in numbers

At the very time when there have been so many reports saying that we are running out of trained baristas, the Beverage Standards Association has reported some success which goes right against the trend – 2019 was a highly successful year for the BSA's Approved Centres and Accredited Trainers, with a 27 per cent increase in students being trained.

The shock-horror stories of barista shortage have been reported since 2017, when one of the trade's research houses suggested that to match the growth rates in coffee house openings, the trade would need to recruit 40,000 new staff by 2025. And as we have already reported, the 'Preserving the Art of Hospitality' research suggested that 97 per cent of managers in this trade expect a shortage of labour as a result of hard Brexit, and that the UK does not have the workforce available to fill the shortfall.

The daily press has recently suggested that while we have 150,000 people working as baristas (a figure which you might consider to be a vast under-estimate, bearing in mind how many outlets now serve speciality coffees) this is well under the number we need to form a high-service coffee industry.

And yet, reports the BSA, we are now seeing an upturn in the number of new people being trained. Is this an 'arrival' of new staff into the trade, and are we successfully encouraging more people to consider a career in coffee?

At Miko in Scotland, which is the BSA's most successful accredited training centre, Lorna McCandlish works with the Prince's Trust and already has over twenty schools involved.

"My source of trainees is the Innovative School project in partnership with the Princes Trust and Developing Young Workforce, and I have a healthy stream of candidates which grows year on year. They are aged 14-16 and have no idea what they would like to do once they leave school, so we are certainly introducing fresh minds into the industry.

"Each of these schools has the equipment to run a coffee enterprise, so we can give the candidates skills and knowledge in customer service along with the practical skills; we are now producing a workforce with the right base skills that can be polished and honed by employers."

It goes farther than just coffee-making, she stresses.

"I feel that our course enlightens the trainees to the back-end or unseen side of the industry, because it gives insight that the coffee industry does not begin and end with 'just serving coffee'. We give insight to the whole industry from roasters, trainers, to engineers and storemen, who make the trade run on a daily basis."

So, is the City and Guilds course actually putting people into work? Have the BSA's accredited centres achieved



Hands-on work at Stokes of Lincoln

jobs for those who didn't have any, or promotions for those who were on the bottom rung?

"I believe we have managed to help a good majority of people to get jobs in the trade," confirms Mike Palliser, who runs the training centre with the second largest number of City and Guilds students, at Stokes of Lincoln.

"The majority of those who seek out our training are looking for a new skill-set to increase their possibility of getting a job. They see that coffee shops are extremely popular, and they see that those who have some initial training or even a qualification/certificate have a better chance of getting a job.

"We work with the Prince's Trust and Lincoln College to train those who have been struggling to find work, and we do see great results in businesses taking them on from these courses."

Last year, Stokes devised an imaginative 'taster day' for these applicants, which involved a Dragons' Den activity about creating a new recipe for a drink; the idea was to give every applicant a chance to show their creativity and personality.

At Miko, Lorna McCandlish reports a distinct improvement in the character of young trainees.

The schools in her area who have equipment with which to make and serve coffee have used it to create specific training projects – several schools have created their own coffee shops, either mobile or on school premises, to introduce young people to the concept of business, get experience in customer service skills, and in some cases raise money for charity.

"I am lucky to hear of so many wins we have had on these projects," she told us. "The teachers involved in the projects continually comment on the trainees' increased confidence, work ethic, improvement in communication

Continued...

skills, progress outwith their comfort zones and the ability to problem-solve. Some may not go into our industry, but our course gives them skills required for any work environment."

Have the main requirements of barista training changed in recent years? It is only a few years ago that all training dictated that shot doses of 7gm were the absolute standard, and concepts like single-origin espresso and the flat white were relatively unheard-of.

You still have to start from the same place, say the BSA's accredited trainers.

"It is true that nowadays there are more varieties of coffee, and that each coffee demands a different approach, but I consider this a slightly more advanced training," says Mike Palliser. "Cafe businesses tend to use one house coffee, so the training I deliver is more focused on the equipment and the coffee they use, rather than how to adjust for different coffees.

"Moving further towards extraction theory and manipulating flavours is more in our 'home barista experiences' – these are the people who are more likely to experiment with different coffees."

At Miko, Lorna McCandlish also sees that trainees are aware of the more complex coffees being offered by the cool coffee houses, and says that although there are basics to go through first, her trainees can find these fun: In particular, she says, they find work with milk is challenging and yet turns out to be enjoyable.

"There is the problem of the Youtube brigade who have watched a couple of videos and now want to create a tulip, a swan and thirty hearts on the surface of a 8oz cup... but they make foam that resembles molten lava!

"I find that a lot of these people do not understand the chemistry behind great milk. But these can be the most fun sessions, because their joy when the realisation and understanding hits is infectious and encouraging. This reaction from the candidate, and their pride, is what makes me, as a trainer, feel accomplished."

It is potentially a good thing for a coffee business to be an accredited C & G training centre. It is of course a revenue stream, and while becoming an accredited C&G training centre does involve certain requirements and costs, the BSA notes that doing so through the association does tend to keep these costs lower.

To find out how to become an accredited centre, contact training@beveragestandardsassociation.co.uk



Imaginative sources of newcomers to coffee continue to be seen across the industry. The founder of the Change, Please project in London, Cemal Ezel, has observed that just as the coffee industry is reportedly facing a huge skills shortage, so is there a huge number of homeless and jobless people looking for a way back into the world of work – he has created the Old Spike roastery, a café and a mobile coffee stall.

So far, several dozen people have been trained in café and roastery work. And in the first week of this year, Mencap opened a new venture in Worthing designed to give opportunities to unemployed people with learning disabilities.

Meanwhile, a training project was involved in a curious pop-up coffee shop which appeared in Selfridges for the first few weeks of this year, featuring a giant yellow adult-sized slide.

This was the New Ground café, an ethical coffee shop which trains ex-offenders. New Ground is based in Oxford, has an in-house roastery, and has now developed a trade supply service for cafes who care to support its work.

At Selfridges, it serves coffee from 'an exclusive Selfridges blend'... and, perhaps oddly for such a store, there's even the option for a shot of CBD oil.

(Elsewhere, we have come across the first case of police acting against a café selling CBD oil; a coffee house in Basingstoke was raided by police acting on the orders of a magistrate, and certain stock was seized. The café owners told their local press that they sell cannabis oil-infused cakes, coffees and teas, which are non-psychoactive and within legal limits - they said that it shows how the authorities are 'misinformed' about this increasing addition to café menus.)

A backlash begins against non-dairy milk, blamed for large decline in bees

Allegra's recent report suggests that "nearly one-fifth of UK consumers frequently request a dairy-alternative milk with their coffee shop beverage" – however, there has now been a surprising backlash against almond milk, which has for several years been held up as one of our best dairy-free options. It is reported that while it is now regularly seen in coffee shops as a lower-calorie, vegan-friendly product, it comes at a heavy environmental cost. According to a new report, the growing demands of the California almond industry, which produces more than 80 percent of the world's supply, have wiped out billions of honeybees which are needed to pollinate the orchards; beekeepers are blaming the enormous quantities of pesticides used on almonds. Almonds are also believed to be an environmentally-unfriendly crop because it takes a gallon of water to produce a single almond, and that in a state where there has been drought for years.

Something never done before in coffee...

Several coffee-loving individual customers, a multi-national hotel chain, and some restaurateurs, all have their names on coffee trees on a farm in Kenya. It is a unique project, says the company behind it.

A lot has been said, and indeed has been said elsewhere in this issue, about how much work is actually done at origin by coffee suppliers who are so quick to talk about their 'direct' sustainable work in supporting coffee farmers. So we were particularly intrigued this month when one of the UK's regional papers reported on a trip a couple of coffee drinkers had made to a plantation in Kenya... because they actually own a couple of trees on the farm.

When we looked deeper into this, the British coffee company who sold them their trees told us: "yes, we have set up something never done before in coffee!"

The coffee company turns out to be Paddy and Scotts, which began as a little regional supplier of cool coffee until it found itself chosen as supplier to the inhouse cafes of big companies such as BMW, HP, and Google. Paddy and Scott then created a hundred branded instore cafes in places like garden centres, replaced Starbucks in forty sites of a top hotel chain, and started exporting its brand round the world.

And recently they bought a coffee farm.

Effectively, they have paid for the revival of a family farm in Kenya. There is a reason that small farms remain small, say Paddy and Scotts – it is that these hard-working farmers pick coffee by hand, deliver in a basket to the local coffee co-operative, where their coffee gets mixed up in a silo with every other farmer's crop before it disappears into the massive chain of the world's bulk coffee trade. Very little money from this commodity trade route gets back to the poor farmer, so they never have a chance to develop the family farm into something profitable.

What, said Paddy and Scott, would happen if they offered to go in as partners with the farmer and his family? Could they create a better way to get a farmer's coffee to the outside world, give the farmer more control over what happened to his crop, and a better return?

Their investment is a particularly novel form of direct trade.

"Direct-traders tend to buy from farmers, whereas we have committed to be ten-year partners of the farmer," Scott Russell told us. "As far as I'm aware, no other coffee company has done anything like this. We really can speak about 'our farm', because every single tree and bean is for us. It's a brilliant story, it's a ground-breaking project, it has never been done before, it was a madcap idea, and we're proud of it!"

How good is the coffee?

It is good enough to score 84 per cent on the internationally-accepted scale, in which beans have to be



A second home for Paddy and Scotts, says the farm sign in Kenya

rated over 80 to be classed as 'speciality coffee', responds Scott. This farm's score puts it near the top of the international 'very good' grading.

Finding the right farm to partner with took a long time, and it was Eric Duncan of the James Aimer roastery in Dundee who finally led Scott to his new partners, a 'little gem' of a family coffee farm in the Meru region of Kenya.

"We had been introduced to farms elsewhere, but we found that in India and south America, farms can be owned by several families, which of course made it all the more complex to propose and organise a partnership. But Kenyan farms tend to be owned by individual families."

The financing of investment in the farm was difficult. Several banks refused to be involved – one actually laughed at them – and a Kickstarter crowdfunding venture was scrapped. Eventually the partners remortgaged some property, and Scott Russell now estimates that £100,000 has already been sunk into the project, paying for remodelling the entire farm, involving washing stations, hiring an agronomist, and buying new trees. The investors even helped with digging a new water supply to the farm, which was a bigger project than it sounds... water had to be brought fully six kilometres, in trenches dug out by hand with machetes, and it took them several months.

To begin bringing some money back in, Paddy and Scotts then came up with the novel idea of selling individual coffee bushes to British coffee fans.

Four thousand plants on the farm were each geo-tagged and numbered, and several hundred of them were made available to the public and were quickly sold. Other plants were sold to corporate investors, including some

*"We're in this
for ten years
at least..."*

- Scott Russell



restaurants and also the Marriott hotel group, who have been enthusiastic supporters.

"In the beginning, we offered a tree for £149," explains Scott. "Those who bought a tree had it planted, but of course they had to wait three years to see any coffee from it. This tended to confuse people, so we changed the deal to offer a mature, already-yielding plant for £59. And yes, several of the individuals who have bought a tree do now have their own coffee roasted and sent to them.

"The rest of the coffee from the farm goes into blends we have created from it. We have to make it clear that these blends also include coffee we buy from other farms in the area, because our own little farm just could not cope with all the coffee we need."

One of these blends is a particularly novel one.

Realising that the farmworkers' children went to a run-down local school, Paddy and Scotts worked to virtually rebuild it. Having done so, they then created a mini-farm, planting several young coffee bushes so that the pupils could grow their own coffee. The first crops went into a blend named Jerrycan, because that's how the children brought water to school before the new pipeline was laid.

Proceeds from Jerrycan pay for the education of children whose parents could not afford to send them to the school – and the coffee was named fourth best-tasting by the Independent last year!

This all amounts to more than just claiming direct-sourcing of coffee so the brand can tick a box, says Scott Russell.

"We're here for ten years at least."

The Fairtrade brand Traidcraft has launched what it believes is a world first with its 'transparency coffee' - it has printed the price it pays to farmers on the front of each packet. Traidcraft says it will be paying more than twice the amount paid in the New York coffee exchange to growers in Honduras and Indonesia.

A Traidcraft spokesman said: "We are declaring the exact amount of money which goes back to origin. This makes our coffee, to our knowledge, the first coffee in the world to do this."

It is reported that nearly forty coffee shops in London have signed up to trials of the new 'app' called Cofe, which launches this April. The idea is that customers can order their coffee ahead, and although some chains already allow customers to order from their mobiles, the difference with this one is that it offers access to so many different sites. The system has been on test in Kuwait and the UAE, with businesses including Costa Coffee and McCafé, and is reported to process more than 100,000 transactions a day.



A coffee cart is to go on display in the Museum of London, which is to re-open in a Smithfield site in a few years' time. This is Syd's coffee stall, which was opened in Shoreditch in 1919, and closed recently after exactly a hundred years in business. The coffee stall, which has been something of an East End landmark, is a mahogany cart with brass fittings and etched glass, custom-made by a local coachbuilder, at a cost of £117. It was the first coffee cart in London to have mains electricity - because the owner hooked it up to a nearby lamp-post! We can't help thinking that there is something very appropriate about keeping something which operated in the area which was to become the centre of the modern cool coffee trade.

Still in the museum world, the Egyptians have created a takeaway coffee cup record – a mosaic of King Tutankhamun's death mask has been created out of 7,260 paper cups at the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza. It also involved 65 kilos of coffee and a thousand litres of milk. But you won't be able to see it yet – the museum, which was planned fifteen years ago, still hasn't opened to the public.

Ford is now recycling McDonald's coffee into car parts. To be precise, this is the chaff which comes off beans during the roasting process; there have been many projects working to turn this waste product into something useful, and Ford has now found that it can replace one of the non-renewable minerals previously used in its headlamps. The chaff is heated to high temperatures under low oxygen and mixed with additives to form a bioplastic; the parts are 20 per cent lighter than the old headlamps, yet stronger, and require 25 per cent less energy to make. Ford has been quoted as saying: "we need to get people in the mindset that this chaff is not waste, it is a valuable product."

A BSA ready-reference directory...

refer to the BSA website for more details of these companies

3M Water Filtration Division 01344 858000 www.3m.co.uk/filtration
Allpure Filters 01252 519955 www.allpurefilters.com
Arden Coffee 01246 25 28 32 www.iwantacoffeemachine.com
Barry Callebaut 01244 370500 www.barrycallebautvending.co.uk
Brita 01869365840 www.brita.co.uk
Bryan Stockley Consultancy 01507 466990 <http://www.bsco-ltd.co.uk>
BWT 07831382929 www.bwt-uk.co.uk
Café 2U 0845 6444 708 www.cafe2u.co.uk
Caffeica 01993 776753 www.caffeica.co.uk
Cimbali 020 82387100 www.cimbaliuk.com
Clockwork Coffee 01753 548 009 www.clockwork-coffee.co.uk
Coffea Arabica 07766533157 www.coffeaarabica.co.uk
Coffee 1652 01744762919 www.coffee1652.co.uk
Coffee Care 01756 794 811 www.coffeecare.co.uk
Coffee Classics 0844 800 5387 www.coffeeclassics.co.uk
Coffee Origin Trips 07802 299054 www.coffeeorigintrips.com
Coffee Perfection +353 01 825 3981 [coffeeperfection.ie](http://www.coffeeperfection.ie)
Coffeeman Devon 01803 873759 www.coffeemandevon.co.uk
CoffeTek 01275 844471 www.coffetek.co.uk
Coffix Ltd 01530 242800 www.coffix.com
Coffox Ltd T/A Cafesuccess www.cafesuccesshub.com
Complete Beverage Solutions 01635 877173 www.cbs-beverages.co.uk
Cornish Coffee (Miko) 01209 215555 www.cornishcoffee.co.uk
Edgumbes 01243 555775 www.edgumbes.co.uk
Espresso Services 0141 425 1083 www.espressoservices.co.uk
Espresso Solutions 01293 769825 www.espresso-solutions.co.uk
European WaterCare 01279 780268 www.watercare.co.uk
Farrer's 01539 720020 www.farrerscoffee.co.uk
Fracino 0121 328 5757 www.fracino.com
GMS Espresso 01494 484319 www.gmsespresso.com
H2O Direct 01892 669628 www.h2odirect.co.uk
Inglehurst Foods 01420 563 413 www.inglehurst.co.uk
Kimbo 0208 743 8959 www.kimbo.co.uk
Kokoa Collection 0208 8832660 www.kokoacollection.co.uk
LF Spare Parts Ltd 01285 861625 www.lfspareparts724.com
M*A*D Training Solutions 07768 884693 www.coffeetraining.co.uk
Miko 0800 496 39 39 www.miko.co.uk
Pentair Water Belgium +32 (0)14 283 504 www.pentairfoodservice.com
Plantation Coffee 01733 830875 www.plantationcoffee.co.uk
Pumphreys Coffee 0191 4144 510 www.pumphreys.co.uk
Qualitasse 01256 300050 www.qualitasse.co.uk
R.W Stokes 01522 512548 www.stokes-coffee.co.uk
Rainforest Alliance 00 31 20 422 8856 www.rainforest-alliance.org
RBC East Midlands www.rbcem.co.uk
Rcoffee 0161 448 9171 www.rcoffee.co.uk
Rhode Island Coffee 01204 702 338 www.rhodeislandcoffee.co.uk
Robert Mallerman www.spray-dryer.com
Speciality Tea Academy UK 07976517128 www.ukteaacademy.co.uk
 01283 712332 www.bartonmarina.co.uk
The Black & White Coffee Co 01205 460700 www.southlincsfoodservice.co.uk
The Brew Group 0845 450 0500 www.caffesociety.co.uk
The Coffee Cart Company 01432 278626 www.coffeecartcompany.co.uk
The London School of Coffee 0208 439 7981 www.londonschoolofcoffee.com
The Office Coffee Company 020 3763 4035 www.office-coffee.co.uk
The Proton Group 01924 892 834 www.proton-group.co.uk
Total Refreshment Solutions/Arumba 0131 448 0666 www.arumba-coffee.co.uk
Voyager Coffee 01364 644440 www.voyagercoffee.co.uk

Cafes on both sides of the world have again been falling foul of local laws. In New Zealand, the management of the Sign of the Takahe café, which is in an old building designed to look like an English manor house, have been told that they are not allowed to have their windows cleaned. This is apparently against the national rules for heritage buildings, but causes a problem in that many visitors come to the cafe because of the wonderful views!

Meanwhile, in Chiswick, the new owners of the Coffee Traveller café came in for a council complaint over the old bike which props up a blackboard directing people to the café. They were told the bike needed planning permission and were given 48 hours to remove it. It had only been in place for three years!



Believe it or not, this is the coffee-themed costume worn by the Vietnamese entrant at the Miss Universe pageant. The outfit called Ca Phe Phin Sua Da (that's the famous Vietnamese recipe of filter coffee with condensed milk and ice) featured a coffee filter hat and she carried a giant spoon. The entrant had to give up the idea of a skirt designed like a cup because she could not walk in it. Sadly, although she made the top twenty, she did not get to the final, unlike last year's Vietnamese entrant, who made the top five... wearing a costume inspired by a loaf of bread. Yes, really...



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www.beveragestandardsassociation.co.uk 07944 161785

admin@beveragestandardsassociation.co.uk