

## MASTER CHEF APPRENTICES TAKE FOOD TO THE FINE DINING EXTREME

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The British plate is one of extremes with established markets for cheap fast food at one end and organic, seasonally and locally sourced fine dining at the other. As Spam fritters return TV advertising and to the plates of the UK, at the other end of the spectrum apprentices are pushing the boundaries of cooking using techniques honed by the likes of elBulli and Heston Blumenthal.

Aspiring to Michelin stars of their own, ten top apprentices from the East of England spent the day developing new techniques and original concepts using ingredients from the world renowned, three Michelin star restaurant, elBulli. Part of a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) expert cookery class at Cambridge Regional College on 25 February 2009 the students worked to combine food and science with innovative Texturas ingredients created by Ferran and Albert Adria and exclusively imported to the UK by East Anglia based Infusions4Chefs.

El Bulli which receives 2,000,000 reservation requests for just 8,000 places is at the very top of its game and there's certainly not a Spam fritter in sight. Just as the students were busy working on their new concepts, so too is head chef Ferran Adria and his team as they gear up to open for the new season on April 1<sup>st</sup>. With

just weeks to go, the finishing touches will be being put to a completely new menu of over 100 dishes which no other restaurant does each year.

The apprentices echoed Ferran's workshop approach and unlike their usual classes were encouraged to experiment and be creative, accepting that some ideas would work and others would not. The students, who were lead by experts from Infusions4Chefs, also explored Ferran's philosophy that true creativity involves coming up with something that has not been done before and novelty alone is not enough. They also benefitted from the values Ferran instills in his team and evidences in work: it is impossible to be creative without good organisation. The group also learned of the careful combination of technical knowledge, experience, a developed palette, good organisation and many hours of work.

Following the workshops, demonstrations and working to set menus, the students were tasked with a mystery box of ingredients and asked to develop and present ideas of their own. The results were exciting and innovative for learners using Texturas ingredients for the first time. The ingredients which are designed to broaden the range of possible textures in cooking combined with the expertise of the students created:

**Béarnaise spheres** – formed through the process of sferificación (or spherification), a spectacular culinary technique that was put into practice at elBulli in 2003. By controlling the gelification of a liquid by mixing with algin and submerging in a calcic bath you can make spherical preparations in various sizes: caviar, eggs, gnocchi, raviol In this instance, gluco was used, it comprises calcium gluconolactate, a mixture of two calcium salts (calcium gluconate and calcium lactate) and is a product rich in calcium and perfect for the technique of inverse spherification. It adds no flavour whatsoever to the food under preparation.

**Cubes of seafood and saffron consommé** which used gellification agent agar. Extracted from a type of red algae, agar is a gelling agent which has been used in Japan since the 15th century. It can form gels in very small proportions and can be used to make hot gelatins. Agar is sold as a refined powder which is mixed whilst cold and brought to the boil. Once gelled, it can withstand up to 80 °C so could be used for hot products or even hot versions of usually cold foods such as jelly and ice cream!

And, for those who've always wished for x-ray vision, **transparent mushroom and tarragon ravioli** also created with combination of agar and gellan, a recently discovered gelling agent obtained from the sphingomonas elodea bacteria. Gellan allows chefs to obtain a firm gel that slices cleanly and withstands temperatures of 70° C (hot gelatine).

Helen France, Director of Apprenticeships at the LSC, says: "In order to progress from competence to excellence it is crucial that these apprentices are not limited by theoretical boundaries or fear of failure. The key is being encouraged to experiment, to improve their knowledge of food under new and exciting circumstances and to use innovative ingredients and techniques for the first time something which comes as standard at elBulli."

Ian Sparke, tutor and chef at Cambridge Regional College said: "These apprentices have never done anything like this before and their willingness to learn and be creative with the ingredients has produced some really impressive and inventive results. It's great to come one step closer to the brilliance of Ferran Adria, to use ingredients he created and to gain an insight into the techniques he uses. I hope the group aspire to his truly excellent and creative standards in the

future. This class has helped all involved to raise their game and strive not just to be good but to be world class.”

The class is part of the 2009 From Competence to Excellence programme which is building on the success of the series of 500 classes held in 2008. Expert classes are running throughout England throughout January to March 2009. 1200 young people across the country will participate. Through the expert class programme, training providers and employers can share best practice and contribute to a lasting skills legacy.

Helen concludes: “The LSC believes that this programme will help apprentices and vocational learners to take their skills to world class levels. Understanding the difference between being competent and excellent is a crucial part of any learner’s journey. Expert classes also allow trainers to develop better links with employers and really promote world class skills across a range of industries. The expert input that apprentices get in these classes will be a fantastic boost to their learning and demonstrate the real value of an Apprenticeship for their future.”

There are currently 240,000 apprentices working in over 130,000 organisations in England alone, across 80 different sectors of industry. Apprenticeships are also increasingly being recognised and used as a pathway to university, often part time and with financial support from their employer whilst they continue to work. The From Competence to Excellence programme is a stepping stone for participants, helping them move from learners to experts. With the UK WorldSkills event on the horizon, some of them may even become future entrants to the UK WorldSkills Event in London in October 2011.

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**Notes to editors:**

For further information go to [www.fcte-events.com](http://www.fcte-events.com)

**About From Competence to Excellence**

Funded by the LSC and delivered by Deloitte MCS Ltd, this project is supporting WorldSkills UK competitions by helping to build capacity and demand for skills competitions across vocational, educational training.

**About Learning and Skills Council:**

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. It is responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. It has a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Its vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. The LSC works nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.