

## ***Jamie Oliver's cook on North East tour for LSC***

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The school cook who worked with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver to improve the quality of school dinners visited the North East today to check on work being done in the region's schools to train school support staff.

Nora Sands, cook at Kidbrooke School in Greenwich, visited schools at Gateshead, South Tyneside, Darlington and Stockton on Tees to meet kitchen staff and make presentations to support staff, including classroom assistants, dinner ladies and a caretaker, who have completed vocational courses to improve their knowledge and skills, through the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) Train to Gain service.

Nora became a familiar figure as a result of the hit Channel 4 series, Jamie's School Dinners, which has been credited with inspiring a shake-up in school kitchens, led by the Prime Minister among others, to transform menus too dependent on junk food that was popular with children but lacked nutritional value. The importance of training was highlighted in the programme.

One member of staff Nora met at Ingleby Mill Primary School, Ingleby Barwick, was Avril Lines. While 67-year-old Avril supervises the lunches at Ingleby Mill Primary School, Ingleby Barwick, in Stockton, she epitomises the change in role and status that has seen the humble dinner lady transformed into a "lunchtime assistant".

Nora presented Avril and other school support staff with Train to Gain aprons to commemorate their commitment to gaining new skills and qualifications. She discussed school menus and the effort being made by the school staff to improve the nutrition and eating habits of the pupils.

The most tangible difference for Avril is that she has gained a Vocational Qualification (VQ) Level 2 for Support Work in Schools, achieved following a period of learning under the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Train to Gain service. Her success has inspired seven colleagues of the school's 17 support staff to take up similar studies towards VQs and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

Avril said: "You have to help the children both inside the school and in the playground. We encourage them to eat their meals and choose healthy food. In the playground we have to ensure there is no bullying or swearing, and to make sure that no child is ever left to play alone."

"The others said that if an old wrinkly like me can do it, so can they. We are all enjoying learning together and the training makes you realise what else is involved in running a school.

"I used to tell people that I just worked at the school. But when I started the course and had to write down all that I did, it made me realise that I didn't just 'work at the school'. Supervising lunchtimes in the school doesn't just mean keeping order in the dining room."

Mrs Barbara Martin, head teacher at Ingleby Mill Primary School, said: "The training widens the lunchtime assistants' understanding of how schools operate. It

allows them to make a strategic input into the life of the school and it is very rewarding to see the ladies working together. The result is that we get a better skilled and more enthused workforce and this reflects in the quality of the service we provide.”

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said:

“Schools rely on the skills of their support staff for many more responsibilities than was the case in the past. The programmes available under the Train to Gain service enable staff who might previously have gained no educational or vocational qualifications to learn new skills in the workplace and to take on essential additional duties.

“Learners such as Avril are an example to all.”

Train to Gain aims to help organisations get the training they need to stay ahead in a competitive environment by improving the skills of the workforce and has been developed as part of a wider effort by the Regional Skills Partnership in the North East to increase the productivity and further regenerate the region.

A skills brokerage service jointly funded by LSC North East and the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, will offer impartial advice and match training needs to local providers of learning, to ensure that flexible, responsive training programmes are delivered to meet employers’ needs. A core element of Train to Gain is the access to appropriate funding for Skills for Life, first Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Level 3 NVQ’s and Management and Leadership learning opportunities.

For more information about Train to Gain, call 0800 0833312 or visit [www.traintogain.gov.uk](http://www.traintogain.gov.uk)

## **ENDS**

### **Editor's Note:**

Photo captions:

Avril Lines, serves lunch after gaining qualifications to work in school at the age of 67

Caption: Nora Sands celebrates the training success of staff at Ingleby Mill Primary School. Back Row (left to right): Dorothy Garbutt, Sue Ford, Judith Johnson and Sandra Crawford. Front row: Avril Lines, Nora and Mandy Hollifield.

Caption: Nora Sands meets the school assistants and pupils at Ingleby Mill.

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

In the North East the LSC and One NorthEast are working closely with other agencies to ensure that the design and delivery of Train to Gain is fully integrated with other types of support on offer to business. This includes ensuring the skills brokerage services is integrated with the Business link branded support service and that support available is fully aligned with the support to employers from other agencies in the region, such as Jobcentre Plus – who can assist with recruitment of staff.

Train to Gain service provides:

- A comprehensive analysis of an organisation's training needs, which also identifies the elements that may be applicable for funding, as well as those for which the employer must pay.
- Easy access to relevant, flexible, high quality training, delivered mostly in the workplace using an "assess-train-assess" model, which takes the employee's prior learning and experience into account.
- Information and support to access a wide range of training packages including higher level qualifications (including Level 3) and training which may not lead to a qualification.
- Information and advice to employees on qualifications and training, eligibility for LSC funded learning opportunities, financial support, skills shortages and priorities.
- Support to develop strategies to address future training needs, which are aligned to wider business objectives.
- A contribution to wage costs to help employers when staff are absent from work due to training (available only to companies with under 50 employees).

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