

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.

While Nora and Jamie Oliver took healthy eating to a national platform, the LSC North East was promoting the Train to Gain service in the region's schools to raise standards by providing training to support staff – classroom assistants and dinner ladies. The courses cover topics including nutrition, how to encourage children to

eat more healthily, social behaviour, including awareness of bullying, and health and safety in school and the playground.

Nora met staff and presented aprons marking their Train to Gain achievements at Caedmon Community Primary School, Gateshead, Westoe Crown Primary School, South Shields, Whinfield Primary School, Darlington, and Ingleby Mill Primary School, Ingleby Barwick, Stockton on Tees.

She said: “It is very encouraging to see the work going on in the North East to raise the skills of staff who are involved with the health and welfare of our children. All support staff play a vital role in schools, from teaching assistants in the classroom to the lunchtime staff, who are aware of the need to improve the eating habits of the children. It’s great to see that they are all gaining the skills needed to support the excellent work they are already doing.”

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: “The training of school support staff has always been high on our agenda. The roll out of Train to Gain has provided us with the ideal opportunity to encourage schools to ensure their support staff have the qualifications they need. As a result, many schools in the region are now developing the skills of their non-teaching staff using programmes under the Train to Gain service. We are delighted that Nora Sands has been with us today to see the progress that is being made and to commend the staff involved for all their hard work.”

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, offers impartial advice and matches 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 of 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

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Editor's Note:

Photo caption:

Caption: Nora Sands (left) meets classroom assistants Lynda Roll, Margaret Clennell and Paula Drape at Caedman Community Primary School, Gateshead, watched by Chris Roberts, Director, LSC North East.

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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