

Jamie Oliver's school cook on North East tour for LSC

Date of issue 22nd January 2006
Publication number LSC0607 - 072
Embargo until For immediate release

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.

She visited Whinfield Primary School, Darlington, where one of the support staff she met was Phil Wray. When Phil was considered for promotion by the Headteacher and Governors he volunteered to complete a training course, which was funded through the Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain service. This

gave him a Vocational Qualification (VQ) in Support Work in Schools which aided his promotion to Buildings Supervisor.

Phil, 36, was one of five support staff at the progressive Whinfield Primary School to undergo training. Four lunchtime supervisors, June Railton, Louise Higgins, Barbara Legg and Christine Forbes, also gained VQs in School Support Work, gaining knowledge and skills to help them advise pupils on nutrition and healthy eating, deal with behaviour, including preventing bullying, and having more awareness of health and safety.

Nora Sands presented 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.

Head teacher Sheila Williams said: “The training has had such a positive impact on the schools. The staff worked with each other to complete their work. It has given them a better understanding of their roles and made them feel more valued. It also confirmed to them that they have a role that is important to the school and the children and that they were doing work that is very worthwhile.

“Most of the support staff came to the school as parents and progressed to voluntary helpers before taking employment with us. One of our dinner ladies is now hoping to continue her studies to become a qualified teaching assistant. It is very rewarding – we like to grow our own here.”

Phil Wray said: “My training and qualification has given me the skills to support the staff of the school at supervisor level. It helped to highlight what goes on in school and improved my understanding of many aspects of my work, including health and

safety. I use the skills every day and am much more involved in planning and discussing new developments. It has also helped me to deal with contractors and general management of the school site, which is my responsibility day and night throughout the year.”

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.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East: said: “Train to Gain is helping many people to realise ambitions that were previously denied to them. The vocational training taking place in schools among supervisors, classroom assistants and caretakers such as Phil Wray is raising standards of service and developing the skills of the workforce, to the benefit of pupils, teachers and education across the region.”

A skills brokerage service jointly funded by LSC North East and the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, it 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 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: Nora Sands celebrates Train to Gain with (left to right) Christine Forbes, June Railton, Phil Wray, Louise Higgins and Barbara Legg, watched by Michael Mitchell, Skills Development Director.

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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