

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 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.

Nora visited the classroom assistants at Caedmon Community Primary School in Gateshead, who were described as "the engine room of the school" by the acting head teacher.

Clive Wisby said he could not heap praise enough on the classroom assistants following their success in gaining NVQ Level 2 qualifications, giving them the skills needed to first class teaching assistant services.

Classroom assistants Linda Roll, Margaret Clennell and Paula Drape were congratulated on their achievement by Nora Sands and presented with commemorative Train to Gain aprons.

The 250-pupil Caedmon Community School and nursery is dedicated to the ongoing development of its 30 members of staff and recently gained the coveted Investors in People award.

Acting head teacher Clive Wisby said: "We have to ensure that we offer excellent value for money and that our staffing provision is maximising the benefit to the children, so we are enthusiastic about staff development and training.

"The three classroom assistants who have gained their Level 2 qualifications are now continuing their training to achieve Level 3. It has empowered them to take on vital work and I can't imagine how we would manage without them. They are involved in intervention strategies, offering one-to-one support to children who may be in danger of falling behind, and our recovery programme, providing additional maths and reading for children who would benefit from it."

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 of the 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:

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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