

School FEAST is the only training network dedicated to the school food workforce. Its courses are providing cooks, kitchen assistants, kitchen managers, lunchtime supervisors and others with practical skills and qualifications that are recognised by employers nationally. And, as thousands more around the country sign up to School FEAST training, it is increasingly being acknowledged as helping transform the quality and ensure the sustainability of the school meals service.

For more information about School FEAST please visit www.schoolfeast.co.uk

School FEAST travels county-wide to train hundreds

Behind the great work School FEAST centres and partnerships do to raise the skills and expertise of school caterers lies an army of professional trainers. Dee McInerney in Cambridgeshire, where school meal take-up has risen, is one of them.



'We don't force anyone into School FEAST training but we do encourage it. And we see an improvement in the job they do as a result of this training,' says Dee, a School FEAST training instructor with the Cambridgeshire Catering Service (CCS).

Dee works with three other instructors across the county training CCS's 600 catering staff working in 220 schools. Within CCS's schools, take-up of school meals has risen by five per cent in just nine months.

Cambridgeshire's School FEAST training kitchen is part of the national School FEAST network. Among the courses offered are level two NVQs in Food Processing and Cooking, Professional Cookery and level 3 in Hospitality and Supervision. They encourage all their staff to complete courses in manual handling, customer care and health and safety.

School FEAST in Cambridgeshire is highly flexible and Dee is happy to assess training needs and provide training for catering staff in their own kitchens. Some learners prefer training in familiar surroundings and it reduces their time away from the job.

The result is a varied week for Dee. 'This morning I worked with two catering assistants who want to offer more support to their catering managers. Working with recipes on our current menu cycle, I showed them how to make bread using different flours and yeasts. They now have the confidence to step up in an emergency and take over the bread-making in the kitchen – something they couldn't do before.'

Dee and her training colleagues practise what they preach so, although Dee is an experienced chef, she continues training herself through CCS School FEAST. I've completed courses in food safety for managers, nutrition and health, group training techniques, customer care, manual handling and safeguarding children.'

They view things from the school's point of view. 'We'll assess everything from the quality of the food to how the dining room is set out, to how we work with the midday supervisors. And we talk to headteachers to find out what improvements they would like to see.'

Nicola Day, headteacher at Eastfield Nursery and Infant School, is delighted with the standard of School FEAST training that kitchen staff receive. 'I would expect them to understand what it means to work with children and they do. There is a strong feeling in the school that we have a wonderful team in the kitchen who work well together and support us in encouraging children's learning,' Mrs Day says.

'They are also a public face of the school and play an important role in showing parents that their children are in a place that nurtures and cares for them.'

Dee recognises and promotes the link between good, nourishing food and pupils' performance in the classroom. 'We encourage our catering staff to put across to the children the importance of healthy eating. We see lunchtime as an opportunity to educate them and persuade them to try new, healthy foods.'



School FEAST is a national network of 29 centres and partnerships dedicated to training the school food workforce.

For more information, please visit www.schoolfeast.co.uk

Training turns experience into excellence

No two days are the same for peripatetic caterer Julia Wilson, but School FEAST training is taking her passion for providing great food in schools to new heights. 'Experience and common sense takes you only so far in this job,' she says.



'My School FEAST training has helped me to cook better meals and given me the confidence to know that I'm doing it right,' says Julia.

She started as a caterer in a primary school before joining Cambridgeshire Catering Service (CCS) as a peripatetic school caterer, providing cover where needed.

Julia already had masses of catering experience, having worked in the industry since leaving school. But she had no formal qualifications. 'I was a bit stuck. I wanted to join CCS because I knew that I would be able to progress my career through School FEAST training.'

She jumped at the opportunity when a job came up at the Lantern School in Ely. 'It's a production kitchen so I was preparing meals from scratch using locally-sourced, raw ingredients.' Through School FEAST, Julia was also soon on her way to completing her NVQ level two in professional cookery.

'Thanks to the help I received from my managers and colleagues, it took me only four months to complete. I had to show that I could manage the day-to-day running of a school kitchen – opening up, ordering supplies, preparing meals and ensuring a safe environment for colleagues and children.'

Julia has now signed up for her next school FEAST qualification – an NVQ level three in supervisory management.

Working as a peripatetic school cook is demanding but Julia loves it. 'I can be running five different kitchens in a week and working almost anywhere in the county. I'll come into a school and probably won't know the kitchen so must quickly become familiar with everything.'

Of course, some days are harder than others. Julia can find herself preparing as many as 150 meals in a single lunchtime. But, thanks to the training she's had from School FEAST, she always serves lunch on time and safely.

Julia's School FEAST training has encouraged her to seek feedback from the schools she works in and she knows from this that most schools notice when the catering service improves. 'It's important to build a relationship with teaching staff and even encourage them to order a meal from the kitchen.'

Jan Cobley, headteacher at the Lantern School, agrees. She believes that the school catering team is integral to the whole school and learning environment. 'Their training through School FEAST is just as important as the professional development other staff receive.'

'Like many other schools, we are involved in the healthy schools award and it's important that when the children go into lunch these messages are also delivered in the food they eat,' Mrs Cobley says. 'To do this effectively, we need kitchen staff who can explain to the children what makes a healthy meal and why it's important.'

