

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 gives Luke career vision

As one of three men in the catering team at the Blue School, Somerset, School FEAST apprentice Luke James, 19, is proof that the term 'dinner ladies' is out-dated. Every day, the Blue School provides healthy, high quality meals for 1,000 students aged 11 to 18. Its School FEAST kitchen is used to train its 17 catering staff as well as cooks from schools and children's centres across the local area.



'I like working in school. Seeing the kids eating my food is great,' says Luke James, the Blue School's first employed School FEAST apprentice. But it hasn't been easy and Luke has had to show considerable commitment to make a go of it.

'When I left school at 16, I had no ambition to go to college so I got a job with a catering business that supplied meals to local schools. I spent my first year washing up before progressing to work in the kitchen.

'I gained plenty of experience but no formal qualifications. So when the Blue School opened its School FEAST kitchen and offered apprenticeship training to local caterers, my boss and I thought it was a great idea. I started working towards my NVQ level 2 in Professional Cookery.'

Luke works in the school's production kitchen helping prepare the day's healthy meals. However, every fortnight, Luke joins other local catering trainees in the School FEAST training kitchen honing his craft. It also involves theory, so Luke has taken exams in health and safety, preparing meat and preparing vegetables.

'It's not that I couldn't cook before I started training – I'd had plenty of experience. But now I'm learning the correct way of doing things. School FEAST has made me a better school cook, given me lots of confidence and a better sense of where my career is going.'

Employing Luke as a School FEAST apprentice is just the latest stage in the Blue School's drive to enhance the quality of school meals and the environment in which to eat them. Most of the older students used to buy lunch in the high street but now 60% of all students eat school meals – an increase of 20% over the last five years.

Training kitchen staff has been central to this turnaround, explains catering manager Lisa Western. 'When we brought the catering contract in house it became clear that our cooks needed training in cooking from scratch.

'With School FEAST, we can train all our catering staff right up to NVQ level 3 if they want. And we encourage them to complete the School FEAST course for Support Work in Schools (SWIS).

'It's a great means of retaining staff and they are now seen quite rightly as professional cooks.'

Luke's long-term ambition is to set up his own catering business supplying good quality meals to schools and other organisations. But for now, his School FEAST training has convinced him that he wants to continue working in school, honing his skills through School FEAST and possibly going on to do NVQ level 3.

Luke's only regret is that he didn't start sooner. 'If I'd been able to train with School FEAST as soon as I started working in school catering, I'd be fully qualified by now.'

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

Local Masterchef winner credits School FEAST

Laura Franklin, a School FEAST catering apprentice at the Blue School, Somerset, proved her new-found skills by winning a local Masterchef competition.



'I cooked chicken filo parcels with Chinese vegetables followed by chocolate fondant pudding. I was so nervous I was shaking. There were about 10 of us competing and, as well as cooking in front of the judges, we had to lay the table and serve them.'

'I had prepared and practised my menu several times in the School FEAST kitchen, getting feedback from the catering team. But I was still shocked and amazed when I won.'

Her Masterchef success showed Laura just how much she had learned as a result of her School FEAST training at the Blue School. As a School FEAST programme apprentice, Blue School sixth former Laura is working towards her NVQ level 2 in Professional Cookery. She's also studying maths, English and ICT and she may choose to stay on next year to complete her NVQ level 3 and gain more work experience.

Offering School FEAST training to sixth formers is the latest development in the Blue School's push to improve the quality of food for its students. This has involved a revamp of what pupils eat and where. Pupils can now choose from one of three eating areas offering a wide variety of healthy, nutritious fare.

'We were well aware of the tension between teaching our students in lessons about health and well-being and their going straight from this to buying a portion of chips, a fizzy drink and a chocolate bar,' headteacher Steve Jackson says. 'So when the catering contract came up for renewal, we saw this as an opportunity to do something about it.'

Providing School FEAST training for catering staff has been central to the revolution in school meals at the Blue School, where take-up of school meals has increased by 20% from 2008 to 2009. 'There would have been no point developing state-of-the-art school catering facilities if the catering staff didn't appreciate our aspirations and have the skills and motivation to run with the vision,' Steve says.

'The improvement in eating has definitely had an impact on the quality of learning around the school too,' says Steve. 'Afternoons are much calmer than they were.'

For Laura, School FEAST has brought great opportunities. 'I started cooking with my Nan when I was very young and I've always wanted to work in catering,' she says. 'I looked around local colleges but wasn't impressed so, when I heard about the School FEAST apprenticeship programme, I immediately signed up.'

'I'm part of the sixth form and a member of the catering team. I spend two full days in the kitchens working alongside skilled catering staff in the production kitchen and learning new skills in the School FEAST training kitchen.'

'I enjoy everything about the programme, even stacking the washing up. It's about showing you can do a good job.'