

# Food for Thought

Inspiration learning across borders in public sector catering

Toolbox of Best Practice – VoLCS





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## Funding organisation

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) was designed to enable people, at any stage of their life, to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across Europe. With a budget of nearly €7 billion, the programme, which ran from 2007-2013, funded a range of exchanges, study visits, and networking activities.

The Leonardo da Vinci sub-programme funded practical projects in the field of vocational education and training. Initiatives ranged from those providing work-related training to individuals, to larger cooperation efforts.

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**Malmö, October, 2014**

## Introduction

This document has been produced to provide inspiration for those working with public sector catering and who want to address education and training opportunities for catering staff. It is a collection of different examples from the project partners that they felt could improve the confidence and skill level of catering staff. This introductory section can be seen as a guide and background to the different examples that follow. Each example can be printed out and used individually or the entire report can be printed out and used as a reference document. The examples are designed to inspire and create interest in sustainable food and training for cooks.

Catering staff providing food to the public sector have to fulfil many demands. The food should be of good quality, nutritious and attractive, as well as being within a budget. But the opportunities for training and professional development for those working in the public sector can be limited. While there are many who enjoy their work and have a passion for cooking, an increase in the availability and quality of training and development would increase knowledge, self-confidence and professional pride in their work, as well as opening up wider career opportunities across the broader employment market.

Sustainable food systems are systems that are in balance. This is not the same as local systems, but systems that take into consideration social, economic and environmental aspects, such as working conditions, pesticide use and a fair price being paid to producers and workers. Food is one of the joys of life and concerns us all, and is important from a number of different aspects. It is a necessity, in the right amount and combination, for us to feel healthy and do well in nursery, school and work.

Food is also important for our quality of life and wellbeing in health and social care. Eating together fulfils a strong educational, social and cultural function. Moreover, the production and consumption of food has an impact on the climate, on the environment, and on the working conditions and health of those producing food. Through conscious choice we can influence these aspects in a positive direction. This is why we have chosen to focus on sustainable food, by decreasing our climate impact and increasing the amount of organic food served in public sector kitchens. Education and training are vital to increase cooks skills and confidence and assist them in the transition to more sustainable food in the kitchen.

## The VoLCS journey

The EU funded project, Vocational Learning for Sustainable Catering Systems (VoLCS) started in November 2012 and concluded October 2014. The project was funded through the EU's lifelong learning programme for vocational learning (Leonardo da Vinci). The objective was to increase the level of knowledge sharing between partners who are leaders in the field when it comes to sustainable public sector catering.

We started the project so that we could learn from each other; exchange knowledge and experiences around sustainable food production in public canteens and inspire others to follow our learning. We wanted to create a "tool-box" that could be used by anyone who is interested in sustainable public catering, to find out about new ideas to inspire their staff, or themselves, in the kitchen.

The overriding aim of this project is to increase the level of competence in public sector catering. An additional aim is to improve the quality of food prepared in the public sector. It is important to develop the link between vocational training that is available and the actual reality of the work environment and the European employment market.

The objectives of the project include: establishing a system of cooperation between the different partners so that they can learn from each other and create universal tools of best practice that can be applied to make their vocational training as relevant as possible for the catering staff and the job market; establishing what skills are required by the employers and policy makers as well as establishing what skills are needed by the catering staff to meet the requirements of the employers and policy makers, and creating a

toolbox that contains the suggested elements or modules that could be considered when constructing a training or development programme, and one that can be adapted to fit the needs from both sides as well as constructing guidelines that assist in the use and implementation of the tool box.

Our “toolbox” is designed to be used by policy makers, educators and trainers as well as managers and catering staff themselves and anyone who is working in the area of public sector catering. These are seen as the end users of the different examples illustrated in this document.

During the course of the project we have held meetings in Rome, Bristol, Malmö, and Copenhagen. In each city we have met cooks, trainers and policy makers and in some cases visited schools, learning about their best practices and how they are working to develop sustainable practices in their catering. We have also discussed wide ranging issues about how we can work together and implement examples from each other within our own catering systems; also how we can inspire others to do the same.

We have collected examples from each city and then tested these examples in our own cities. The results of these tests are now presented in this document in easy to follow instructions showing how to apply the examples in your own city/organisation.

## **Project partners**

There are six partners in the project from four different European countries. Each of these partners are pioneers and champions of sustainable food in the public sector, and all have been inspired by each other during the course of the project.

In the beginning of the project in 2012, we all believed that we were very different and that our situations were unique and could not be compared to anyone else. After two years we have found that we have more in common than we thought and there is always something we can learn from each other. We have learnt that we are more similar than different when it comes to issues in public catering. We are all working towards the same goals when it comes to sustainability; valuing our staff, being socially aware and cooking from scratch, whenever possible.

### **Environment Department, City of Malmö (Sweden)**

Malmö has more than a decade of experience of progressive investment in environmental and climate issues under its belt. The city has recently published a policy for sustainable development and food where it promotes a holistic approach to improving food served in public kitchens. One of the priorities of the policy is the professional development of staff working in the kitchens. [www.malmo.se/sustainablecity](http://www.malmo.se/sustainablecity)

### **Food for Life Partnership, Soil Association (England)**

The Food for Life Partnership, led by the Soil Association, was established in 2007 and uses food as a way to improve the whole school experience – making lunchtimes a positive feature of the day and enriching classroom learning with farm visits, teaching practical cooking and food growing skills and giving everyone in the school community in the opportunity to get involved. Thousands of Food for Life Partnership schools in England are growing their own food; sourcing food locally; and serving freshly prepared meals that follow the high standards of the Food for Life Catering Mark. [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk)

### **Aalborg University (Denmark)**

The research group FINE (Foodscapes, Innovation and Networks) from AAU Copenhagen is currently involved in the facilitation and development of projects regarding a wide range of aspects concerning public catering and organic conversion of public meals, partnering with municipalities, institutions, organizations and private operators and is the university partner of the Danish Culinary institute (Madkulturen). FINE have recently reported results from a EU research project (iPOPY) on organic school food. AAU has a priority to

establish research and education in relation to sustainable and healthy food and is heading the only Danish master programme on Food Studies. [www.fine.plan.aau.dk](http://www.fine.plan.aau.dk)

### **Albert Sas (Italy)**

Albert Sas is a consulting company provided with ISO 9001 quality certification. It's operative at 360 degrees in the agro-food industry and specializes in the provision of services in the catering industry. All the activities of Albert are conducted in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Since 2003 Albert Sas has been awarded the public tender and has been responsible for all issues related to the meals of 160 000 of Rome's children (users per day). [www.alberts.it](http://www.alberts.it)

### **Roma Capitale (Italy)**

In Rome, the Educational Policies and School, Youth, Equal Opportunities Department coordinates activities relating to school canteens. More than 144,000 meals are served daily across 550 nurseries, primary and secondary schools. 92% of the meals are prepared on site with 69% of them including organic food. Rome has employed an incremental approach to designing its food and catering tenders and its food service, to gradually make these more sustainable and innovative. [www.comune.roma.it](http://www.comune.roma.it)

### **Copenhagen House of Food (Denmark)**

Københavns Madhus was started to achieve results and solve a problem that could not be solved by traditional means. The aim is to involve the entire institution, not only the kitchens, in order to improve the nutritional and culinary quality of meals as well as creating a better meal experience for the individual. They develop projects and hold training courses. Many of their employees are working as change agents out in the institutions. [www.kbhmadhus.dk](http://www.kbhmadhus.dk)

## **How to use the document**

There are a number of examples of educational approaches that we have tested during the project. It was interesting to find that the majority of examples that we use are not traditional "training courses", rather they are a combination of different methods to raise skills levels, enthusiasm and the status of catering staff in the public sector.

As mentioned previously, this document is written as a guide and inspiration for those working with public sector catering who want to address education and training opportunities for catering staff. It is a collection of different examples that have been tried and tested by the project partners to improve the skill level of their catering staff.

This introductory section can be seen as a guide and background to the different examples that follow. Each example can be printed out and used individually or the entire report can be printed out and used as a reference document. The examples were chosen from a longer list of practices that all of the partners had implemented in their cities/organisations. We then chose examples that we thought we could try and implemented them in our own cities/organisations.

## **Focus areas**

We identified five core areas that we felt summarised the key benefits of the different examples within the toolbox. Each activity will have an impact on these areas to varying degrees – we have identified the key areas for each example in the toolbox, but many will, in reality, potentially cover all of these benefits.

### ***Networking (Participation)***

- Covers networking within professional groups, for example amongst cooks, but also across professional boundaries, for example between cooks and teachers.
- Activities that encourage dialogue and meetings both physical and virtual are positive for cooks and contributes to their competency development and their enjoyment of work.

### ***Learning possibilities***

- Linked to knowledge and education as well as organization.
- Many factors to be considered when trying to encourage participants to attend courses.
- Need to consider the level training is put at.
- Important to focus on strengths of organization and staff.
- Take a positive approach.

### ***Motivation and incentives***

- How can you maintain the momentum after a training course?
- How to make things interesting and maintain interest.

### ***Inclusion***

- Leadership and management of organization.
- About working with people and how we value them, and how they can be part of the organisation.

### ***Involvement***

- How to involve the whole "chain": head teachers, teachers, children, parents, suppliers, farmers etc.

## **How to use the examples**

When you have looked through all of the different examples in the different focus areas, you can choose which example(s) you want to work with. You can ask yourself the question, what do we want to learn, or what knowledge gap do we have?

When you are deciding which example to choose remember that you are free to adapt the example to fit your situation. Each workplace is unique and has its own conditions. It is therefore very natural that you might need to adapt the example.

You also need to think about the scale of the test. You can start small and build up. Tests do not need to take a long time; courses can be adapted to fit the resources available and the time frame. When the partners were testing the examples we changed the length of examples/courses. For example in the case of the fish course in the original example, the fish course was a year-long programme; though when testing we organized courses that only lasted a couple of afternoons.

## **Feedback and evaluation**

It is very important to evaluate the process, to collect feedback from course participants and use it to evaluate the success of the example. The contents of the tool box are not set in stone. The examples that we have included can be modified and adjusted to fit the local circumstances. You might find after you have tested one of the examples that you can improve it and make it better, which is great! We want the examples to be used and to develop as they are used.

## Conclusion

After two years the partners in the VoLCS project have realized that we have a number of shared goals and visions in terms of sustainable and good quality food served in the public sector. We have gained an understanding of each other's situations and have learnt a lot from each other throughout the process, illustrating the benefit of cooperating with new actors.

There is more and more evidence linking food and school results. Children that are served fresh and nutritious food are more inclined to pay attention in class, cause less trouble and keep up with their lessons. They also learn to appreciate fresh food, and the importance of nutritious, tasty food. School gardens encourage children to be interested in where their food comes from and how it is produced. Long term sustainability in food production and consumption is important to decrease our climate impact as well as increasing our food security.

# Fish Day

*A day devoted to fish, inviting involvement of both school staff and parents*

**The “Fish Day” is inspired by the Malmö Festival where school and kindergarten canteen cooks have the opportunity to present their work to all citizens, with conversations and culinary demonstrations.**

The relationship between cooks and citizens is facilitated by the staff of the event. Taking a cue from Malmö Festival, on May 10th 2014, Albert Sas has organized the first edition of “Fish Day” in Porto Recanati (Italy).

**“Fish Day” starred the cooks of the canteens of local primary schools. They prepared fresh fish products, which were the focus of the educational project, aimed to promoting healthy eating habits for children.**

The children themselves acted as links with chefs, their parents and the rest of the audience. During the school year the children had the opportunity to follow the Albert Sas educational program co-financed by the Marche Region. It was dedicated to fish and the marine environment and ended with the writing of a play staged by a professional theatre company



*Children filling in a questionnaire about fish.*

## Why choose this example?

The best practice aims to create relationships between the school canteen operators, particularly cooks, and users, in a broad sense, with reference to the parents of the students but also to all citizens. This is because their level of expertise and the quality of the food and the menu offered.

Another object of this best practice is to show the public the result of the educational campaign promoted in schools by Albert Sas. It aimed to accustom students to the use of fish products by a fascinating and playful method that led them to the discovery of the marine environment, the traditions associated with the fishery and aquaculture products, the nutritional properties of fish and their importance to health and, ultimately, the value of sustainability and respect for the environment.

Parents and children do not know enough about the personnel working in school canteens.



*During educational activities children can touch and feel local seafood.*

## How to apply

The Fish Festival has been tested at the end of an educational process for the permanent introduction of fresh local fish on the menu of the school canteen. This involved 350 students of public schools, primary and secondary school in the municipality of Porto Recanati.

The educational activities built around a creative storytelling, "A journey to Robinson's Island" have seen the involvement of two pilot primary classes with 4 teachers, a psychologist and an entertainer. Simulating a sea landscape in the classrooms with its tastes, colours and scents, the children have come into contact with food through a story they have represented.

Even the canteens cooks were also involved after having taken part in a seminar on the preparation of fresh local fish (following the dictates of the research project SAN.PE.I. - fresh organic-farmed marine fish in school canteen), highlighting burgers and medallions, meatballs and fish pulp for pasta.

The results of the project were presented at the Fish day accompanied by documentation (photos, audio-visual, graphical representations and drawings). A presentation and fresh tasting was also offered and children, in a chef's hat, gave their parents and citizens fish balls cooked according to the innovative recipes at school.



*Fish balls made by children in the educational workshop in preparation of the Fish day festival.*

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ The event was satisfactory, from different points of view, for all the people involved and users.
- ✓ The audience had the opportunity to learn useful and interesting information about fish products with special regard to fresh, controlled and short chain from a sustainable environment. In addition, parents of children in particular, were able to observe directly the quality of the food and the service provided at school.
- ✓ The chefs and operators who took part in the event got to show their competence level, something that has been a source of gratification because they received the recognition of their professionalism.
- ✓ The children themselves felt rewarded because of their role as protagonists and link between the chefs and the public. And above all, through this event they have had an enjoyable ending to their educational process, having fun and learning at the same time, aware of the importance of a varied and healthy diet.

Information: [www.alberts.it/it/festival-malmö-fish-festival-under-volcs-project](http://www.alberts.it/it/festival-malmö-fish-festival-under-volcs-project)

➤➤ *This example targets cooks, trainers as well as policy makers and parents. It involves the whole school. It can be a one off event. It requires some investment of time and resources.*

# Information Magazine On School Meals

*A newsletter for cooks working in schools in Rome*

**The prototype of the information magazine called 'At table... with girls and boys' – a quarterly report to learn and talk about school meals in Rome" aims to facilitate communication with users and build a new channel of dialogue with those who are involved in the school canteens.**

The design and realization of the prototype of this "Information Magazine" takes a hint from Malmö "Newsletter & Blog", proposed as a first issue for Roma Capitale. **It is the result of the exchange of best practice carried out under the European project VoLCS.**

Focus groups, brainstorming activities and assessments have been carried out by directors and officers respectively from the Educational Policies and School, Youth, Equal Opportunities Councillorship and the Department of Educational Services. They have represented the primary source for this information magazine. It has been published online in the institutional website of Roma Capitale. It was planned on a quarterly basis (three numbers during the school year), but may have a different frequency.



*Food commodity experts office of the city of Rome, responsible for the collection and preparation of the Informational Magazine.*

## Why choose this example?

The school catering in the city of Rome is a service of excellence so that it has become a model in different international contexts. The service is, in fact, characterized by the high quality of the meals that are 69% organic, tasty and balanced. It respects the environment, seasonality and nutritional needs of girls and boys. In addition, the service is characterized by its high sustainability and the high skill levels of employees in the sector. These qualities are not yet sufficiently known to the user.

For these reasons, a tool like the information magazine can be very useful to provide details to users and to avoid any doubts. It can also be a very useful way to allow the professionals themselves to share news and updates about the service, to talk about their experiences and challenges to reach a more sustainable future. It also represents a source of gratification as it allows a wider audience to know the quality of the work done.



*Cover of the first number of the "Informational Magazine", containing news from the school canteens in Rome.*



*A cook in the school canteen of Rome shows a plate of freshly cooked cod.*

## How to apply

A special focus will be given to Rome's 650 public childhood, primary and secondary schools. You can read in the information magazine projects and suggestions from children, parents, teachers and nutritionists. The sections created for the city of Rome are called:

- *Space for girls and boys* – a section of drawings, poems, stories and various contributions on the theme of food lived in the school canteen.
- *Voice of parents* – a section dedicated to the families of young users.
- *Word of teachers* – an area dedicated to teachers and interdisciplinary experiences in the topics of nutrition;
- *Word of food commodity experts* – a section on in depth legislation and implementation (laws on labelling, transposition of directives, accurate information about the meal service, etc.)
- *Voice of dieticians* – information concerning advice and insight dedicated to the nutritional quality of foods;
- *Answers to users* – a section care of the editorial staff supported by experts.

The realization of the information magazine has the synergic activity of the Councillorship of Educational Services and School, Youth and Equal Opportunities and its Department.

The staff of Rome had already contributed to the creation of brochures and publications, are engaged a few hours each quarter and there is no additional cost for the public Administration. The planning of that magazine needs more communication skills that will be better on working and will increase interacting with different offices of the Department.

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ The experience of the newsletter is a valuable opportunity for staff and a training tool useful to improve the communication skills needed by staff working usually only in nutrition and administrative issues. In particular, the experience was considered especially valuable by the director of service and policy makers in order to answer to the needs that have arisen during the first phase of the project VoLCS, when it was revealed the need to improve communication to users.
- ✓ All the key staff in the service for the school meals were involved and the difficulties relating to the lack of familiarity with writing a magazine were overcome thanks to the example provided by the city of Malmö and thanks to the Press office of the Department. Much more will be done but the work has just begun.

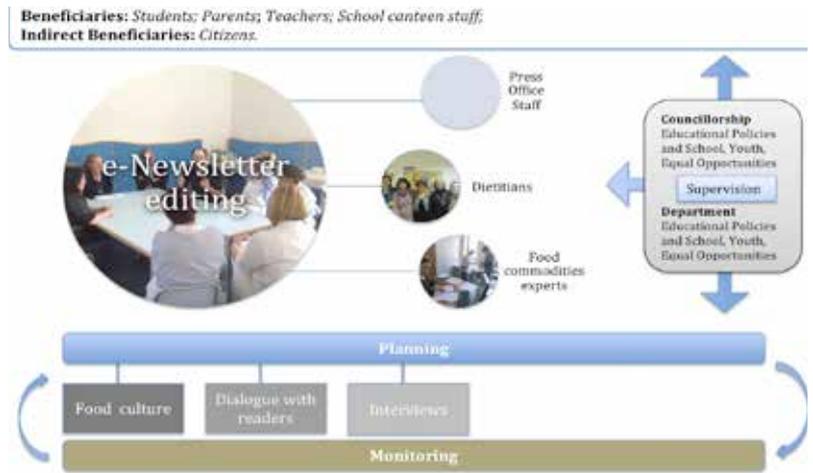


Diagram Chart of "Informational Magazine" Good Practice adopted by the city of Rome inspired by the "Newsletter & Blog" of city of Malmö.

Information: : [www.comune.roma.it](http://www.comune.roma.it)

➤➤ This example targets cooks and trainers. It covers all of the focus areas. It is simple to do and requires little investment. It can become a regular feature to be sent out to staff.

# School Farmers Markets

*Where pupils can sell the produce they grow and cooks can showcase their skills to parents and the local community*

**Our aim was to explore and develop how we can support cooks to become more engaged in activities within their school and community. We were inspired by the Malmö festival, an annual event involving the whole town for a week in August. School cooks participate in cookery demonstrations and showcase the work they do to the general public, promoting their skills and knowledge.**

The Food for Life Partnership is a national schools programme, so bringing this idea to school level, we wanted to share an exciting and expanding area of the project - school farmers markets – and how this can create greater inclusion for our school cooks.

***We have helped many of our schools launch their own farmers markets on their premises. Open to everyone, local farmers and suppliers set up stalls and sell their produce, attracting many people.*** A successful farmers market is something in which the whole school and community can feel proud, so we wanted to make sure the cooks were involved too!



*Learning to grow from a young age.*

## Why choose this example?

We have a perfect opportunity to raise the profile of our school cooks by their involvement in school farmers markets - showcasing the quality and provenance of their school meals alongside local suppliers and school grown produce.

Pupils and teachers put a lot of planning and effort into setting up a market. By encouraging school cooks to get involved from the planning stage, it increases their engagement with the wider school. It also gives them a say in how they can take part and promote their own school dinners and skills on the day.

One of the core aims of the Food for Life Partnership is to encourage more pupils to eat a healthy school lunch. If the school cook can promote his or her food at a public event attended by parents, this will help to build up trust and confidence in the quality of meals being served. It can also build closer relationships between the school cook and the pupils, giving them informed choices about the food they are eating and how it is sourced –and making them feel more involved in the whole food chain.



*Involving the whole school.*

## How to apply

The Food for Life Partnership Farm Links team has developed a Farmers Market Education Pack which supports schools through the various stages of setting up a market. Activities that we would encourage the school cook to get involved in include:

- Joining in with the weekly planning meetings
- Serving a 'farmers market lunch' on the day
- Cooking and serving school meal samples to visitors
- Provide refreshments on the day (fresh lemonade/ healthy smoothies etc)
- Involving the pupils in creating information boards showing where their food is sourced from – including food miles and supplier details – showing that they are proud of their school meals and their responsibilities towards sustainable sourcing



*From school garden to school dinner, bringing cooks and pupils together.*

Farmers markets are seasonal and normally held during the Spring and Summer months, when school gardens are at their peak with fruit and vegetables. This is a great opportunity for the school cook to work with the pupils who are involved in growing food –developing recipes that incorporate the produce, and cooking food to be served at the market. We see this as a great opportunity to bring all the different elements of a school together and celebrate with the parents and wider community!

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ We know through feedback from our National Cooks Network that the greater the involvement cooks have in school life, the better the outcomes for them and the wider school. Also that this can work for at different levels – from small primary up to large secondary schools, a market can be highly effective in engaging the community and linking local suppliers and farmers to whole new groups of people.
- ✓ We encourage schools to bring in as many local suppliers and producers as possible – helping to build up networks and relationships both within the school and the wider community, to the benefit of all.
- ✓ Think of the markets as an excellent educational opportunity. You are increasing the awareness of the pupils as to where their food comes from and wider sustainability issues, and helping create the responsible consumers of the future.
- ✓ Finally, involve your cooks from outset – the more input they have, the greater their involvement and engagement will be. From our experience, cooks want to feel included and, when motivated, wish to develop and share their skills and knowledge.

Information: [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk) | Contact: [fllp@foodforlife.org.uk](mailto:fllp@foodforlife.org.uk) or 0117 3145180 | Follow @FFLPartnership on Twitter!

➤➤ *This example targets both cooks and school staff, as well as parents and local producers. It covers all the different focus areas. It requires investment of both time and resources. Can be a successful and regular addition to the school year.*

# Awards for School Cooks

*Developing an award scheme which recognises the good work our school cooks do*

The Food for Life Partnership (FFLP) brings the whole school and their community together based around the core ethos of food – where it comes from, and how it's grown, cooked and served to pupils. Schools can apply for an award at Bronze, Silver or Gold, as they progress through the levels – and this is awarded to the school as a whole.

We were inspired by our partners in Malmö, who award diplomas to schools which demonstrate an increase in spend on organic and Fair Trade produce. **We wanted to look at developing our own additional award specifically for school cooks, to reward them for the pivotal role they have to play.** Working with the FFLP National Cooks Network, we canvassed opinion about what they'd like to receive recognition for – this award is for cooks so it has to be relevant to them. We also had to think about the processes – who would nominate the cook; how would they apply; how would we select the winners and give them their awards? Finally, what would we call our award!

Moving forward, we're now exploring options for trialling a Cooks Award, to promote and acknowledge the great work our school cooks do in schools across England.



*Keeping the children healthy and happy.*

## Why choose this example?

The most successful Food for Life Partnership schools are those that place the cook at the centre of school life, making them feel included and involved.

The cook can inspire and motivate pupils to eat healthy food; create a welcoming and friendly environment in the dining room; share their skills and knowledge with the wider school community; support food themed events throughout the year and turn their kitchens into the hub at the centre of the school.

School cooks can sometimes feel like they're on their own with no one to share problems and concerns with. Cooks are central to ensuring healthy food is served and eaten. They work behind the scenes and don't always get the credit they deserve for their commitment and efforts.

An award can therefore be a motivational incentive that can lead to further inclusion and networking within a school, and can build up closer relationships between the cooks and the pupils and teachers who nominate them.



*All in a day's work – watched over by Jeanette Orrey!*

## How to apply

Malmö use a system which tracks procurement patterns in their schools – enabling them to accurately measure the spending on organic and Fair Trade. From this they can present awards to cooks at regular ceremonies.

The Food for Life Partnership doesn't monitor to this level of detail so we wanted to explore alternative ways of finding out about our cooks achievements. We also wanted to look beyond just the meal ingredients to include the wider range of activities that cooks are involved in.

We already have our well established award criteria for schools, from Bronze, through to Silver, then Gold. This would be our benchmark – a measure for seeing what activities cooks are engaged in, and how they support their school in achieving an award.

The challenge with any award is to develop a process that's straightforward to administer, ideally web based. We would want our cooks to be nominated by their own pupils and teachers, so want something that's seen as fun as well as educational. Pupils can actively submit photos of their favourite school meals, write stories about why their cook deserves to win an award, and 'blog' about how great their school dinners are!

We see the award as a way of celebrating and sharing the great work cooks are doing – and it gives us an opportunity to promote them on our website and via social media. We want to create a buzz, inspire other cooks to get involved and share their amazing stories.



*Serving a locally sourced freshly cooked school meal.*

## Lessons learnt

✓ We learned that a lot of planning and thought needs to happen to create a successful award scheme! To encourage involvement, the benefits to the school and cook must be clear. You should plan what budget you can commit, and how it will be administered. Will you hold award ceremonies, and if so, how often and where? What prize or award will the cooks receive? Would you want to have someone sponsoring the award? You might want to give your award a name, such as one suggestion we had, 'Canteen Heroes'.

✓ The aim is to create a process that's easy for schools to participate in, and doesn't cause lots of extra administration. For the 'toolbox' we created a sample application form which we can further develop and pilot – we think it's better to test a new award on a small scale before rolling it out to everyone. In the UK, school catering models vary depending on whether the school has its own caterer or uses an outside private or Local Authority caterer, so we need to factor in those issues as well.

✓ Overall we have learned that school cooks themselves are very keen on the idea of an award aimed at them, so we know the enthusiasm to get involved is there and well worth encouraging.

Information: [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk) | Contact: [fflp@foodforlife.org.uk](mailto:fflp@foodforlife.org.uk) or 0117 3145180 | Follow @FFLPartnership on Twitter!

➤➤ *This example targets cooks. A scheme that motivates and provides incentives for the cooks. Requires some investment of time and resources. Can become a yearly event.*

# A School Cooks Newsletter

*Creating a newsletter to share information and news with school cooks across the country*

**Our vision was to create a way of communicating to all our Food for Life Partnership (FFLP) school cooks. We developed this idea based on shared learning from our project partners in Malmö, who have their own cooks newsletter.**

Our very first newsletter *‘What’s Cooking?’* received much positive feedback and has inspired us to want to do more in the future! We piloted it with our National Cooks Network – a group of school cooks who meet or talk regularly, share experiences and provide ongoing support to each other.

***Our aim was to create a resource that was interesting and informative, and could help facilitate networking opportunities among cooks.*** We wanted a professional look, and set it out in a format which was suitable for emailing, printing and posting. We wanted it to be light on text, and carefully planned the content and presentation – enlisting a designer to give it a professional look with plenty of images, and giving us a template for future newsletters. We think it’s a great resource for anyone working with cooks.



*Sharing new recipes and ideas.*

## **Why choose this example?**

We’ve worked with many school cooks, we understand the challenges and pressures they face and that they can feel detached from the school community. By dedicating a newsletter to cooks, we wanted to let them know that they aren’t alone - others share their experiences, and there are many opportunities open to them if we can point them in the right direction.

A newsletter won’t take the place of meeting or directly speaking to other people, but it can be a great starting point – by providing encouragement to make contact with other cooks, giving tips on forming local networks, and advice on what help and support is available.

Although we wrote this pilot edition, it belongs to the cooks – it’s their newsletter! It must be relevant to them and invite their input. By enlisting cooks to share their experiences and write articles for future newsletters, we can motivate them and facilitate the development of learning and involvement - which is what we set out to do with this project.



*Healthy meals for healthy children.*

## How to apply

For a cooks newsletter to be a success, remember who your readers are.

We developed the content using the knowledge and experience of Jeanette Orrey, FFLP School Meals Policy Advisor - a school cook herself for over 20 years, and a passionate advocate for good food in schools. The introduction and content were focused on the cooks, including a 'day in the life' which gave an insight into the world of one school cook.

Think of a newsletter as a learning tool, sharing practical tips and advice. We included a new recipe idea for the school kitchen; also advice on how cooks can benefit from working with pupils who are growing food in the school gardens – making links, creating involvement, letting pupils see the food they've grown themselves actually used in the school dinners.

We received feedback on the newsletter from our National Cooks Network – they were all keen to submit ideas or contribute articles for future editions. They saw it as a great way of encouraging more pupils to eat school dinners, by providing copies to pupils to take home to their families, demonstrating how much passion and commitment cooks put into producing healthy school meals.

Our network appreciated that it was aimed specifically at them, rather than a general newsletter for schools. As long as you have someone to coordinate this, you'll always have a willing supply of cooks who want to contribute to a newsletter!



*Cooks are a part of the whole school.*

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ This newsletter was a trial, and the feedback we received was positive - we knew that cooks would welcome seeing future editions.
- ✓ Consider how often you'll produce one (termly?) and who is responsible for coordinating, editing and distribution. The more you can draw on the expertise within your organisation the better. Make it look visually appealing and interesting. Also remember to include contact details and encourage your readers to give you ongoing feedback. Two pages are sufficient to ensure you can send it via email and as a pdf for easy printing. Online access will enable a wider reach.
- ✓ This pilot gave us the opportunity to work with our Cooks Network and get some valuable feedback, so use your own networks for advice and support.
- ✓ A final 'top tip' from the Food for Life Partnership - school cooks are a real asset – they have so much knowledge and experience, and they are more than willing to share this with other cooks. Use this to your advantage, tap into that resource, listen to them and share their stories.

Information: [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk) | Contact: [fflp@foodforlife.org.uk](mailto:fflp@foodforlife.org.uk) or 0117 3145180 | Follow @FFLPartnership on Twitter!

➤➤ *This example targets cooks. Covers all the focus areas. Simple to implement, can be sent out on a regular basis.*

# Kitchen Promise

*A quality assurance model to raise the standard of the meal experience in schools and pre-schools*

**A meal quality assurance model developed by the city of Malmö was inspired by two examples from the list of best practice. The kitchen promise from Madhuset and the whole school approach in Food for Life Partnership's work in schools in the UK.**

This model has now been developed for use in pre-schools to quality assure meals through certification of their quality. ***It is believed that this work will raise the status of pre-school cooks and create more attractive and sustainable pre-schools in Malmö.*** This is part of the implementation of Malmö's policy for sustainable development and food.

There are a number of areas of action on a check list that pre-schools should consider, such as procurement, cooperation, the meal situation, food as a pedagogic tool, and involvement. They then write an action plan to improve the performance in the different areas of action and finally they go back to the checklist after some time and notice the improvements.



*Working together can increase the meal experience of the children.  
Photo: Ewa Levau*

## **Why choose this example?**

The purpose of kitchen promise/meal quality is to improve the meals in pre-school in many different aspects. The programme is chosen because it is a tool that is very simple to use and to understand.

The intention is to work in a team involving cooks, teachers and managers at a single pre-school level. It is a learning process where the aspects of different professionals have to be taken into account, which improves the involvement.

The kitchen promise can lead to improvements in the pre-school, and we hope to see more pre-schools involved in the programme.



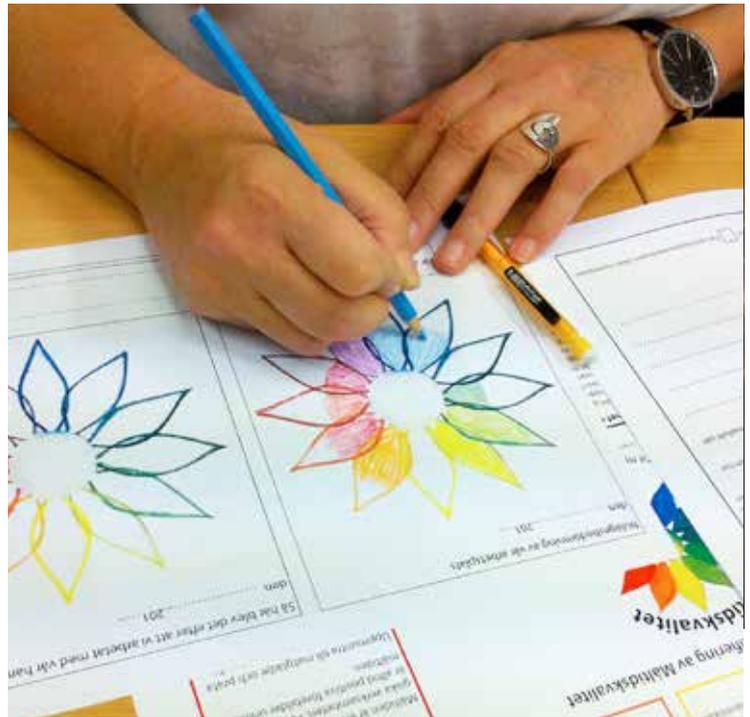
*We want to raise the status of our cooks and create more attractive and sustainable pre-schools in Malmö. Photo: Johann Selles*

## How to apply

The programme lasted a whole year. Ten pre-schools were involved as pilot schools with both the cooks and managers attending the course. They worked through the check list at the pre-school with the rest of the staff. Each of the pre-schools went through a check list together and fill in a flower, with a petal for each of the areas of action according to their level of performance. Then they constructed an action plan to improve their pre-school meals.

The kitchen promise scheme has been a great success with the managers and cooks of the pilot pre-schools. In addition, plans are being drawn up to implement the scheme in the whole municipality, with the pilot pre-schools inspiring other pre-schools in their work.

Work will continue with the pre-school cooks in Malmö to implement our version of the kitchen promise.



Our meal quality flower, original design Bodil Johansson. Photo: Märta Bergkvist

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ Our project partners' methods of working with complex aspects of meal quality and inclusion of food in the curriculum have inspired us to develop our own programme adjusted to our situation and context.
- ✓ The programme was made very simple and colourful to fit the target group and to not be too time consuming when applied. That is an important part of the success. So our advice is just: Keep it simple!

Information: [malmo.se/volcs](http://malmo.se/volcs)

➤➤ *This example targets not just cooks, but also teachers and school managers. It works with networking, learning possibilities, inclusion and involvement. It is relatively simple, does not require great investment and can be conducted over the whole school year.*

# The Fish Course

*Cooks learning about handling and preparing fresh fish*

The idea of focusing on one food product was taken from the city of Rome where they have held an in depth course in the preparation and serving of fresh fish in schools in Rome. These courses have lasted over a whole term.

Fish is a popular item on the menu, but in Malmö it is normally frozen fish. ***This course would educate cooks about why Malmö school restaurants choose fish from sustainable stocks (certified by Marine Stewardship Council) and inspire them to try cooking with fresh fish.*** The example came from the city of Rome where they ran a similar course. The objective of that course was to enhance the use of native fish species that were suitable to be used in school meals.

The project in Rome was more comprehensive than the initial trial to be attempted in Malmö, but it would be a goal to be able to have a long term project that lasted 18 months as the example in Rome (SANPEI – Healthy like a fish).



*Cooks Linn and Alma making the topping for their oven backed cod.  
Photo: Mimmi Hägg*

## Why choose this example?

There have been two courses held in Malmö that have been inspired by the fish course held in Rome.

The purpose of the course in Rome was the enhancement of native species of fish farming and suitable for consumption of children in their school meals. The courses offered in Malmö, though not as ambitious as the course in Rome, are expected to increase the interest in using fresh fish as opposed to frozen fish in pre-school kitchens.

The course developed by Malmö had as a goal to increase the amount of fresh fish in pre-schools and schools in the city of Malmö. At the moment fish is a popular item on the menu and is served once or twice a week, but it is normally frozen fish.



*Flounder, a sustainable fish caught off the coast of Malmö.  
Photo: Märta Bergkvist*

## How to apply

One fish course was planned to make sure the nine participating cooks learned the best way to cook fresh fish and how to optimise the use of the kitchen ovens. An external cook and “oven expert” was invited to the course and showed the participants the difference when cooking fresh fish compared to fish that has been frozen.

After that introduction, the participants were divided into three teams and were encouraged to invent and cook recipes with fresh fish. Some of the dishes made were cod croquettes, baked cod mince topped with tomato sauce, cod topped with mushroom sauce, paprika-topped cod and cornflake-crusted cod. Hopefully one or more of these recipes can be introduced to school menus.

After cooking, all participants ate together and discussed what they had learned. The cooks were very positive about the course, and felt it gave them valuable information regarding how to cook fish and use the ovens in a more effective way. In addition, we also had a course for pre-school cooks to educate them in how to choose fish from sustainable stocks (Certified by Marine Stewardship Council). The course was largely theoretical with a presentation and discussion concerning the issue of over-fishing and sustainable fishing.

The presentation on sustainable fishing was given by representatives from a local marine education centre (Sea-U). After the break there was a more practical session with a local fisherman coming in to talk to the course delegates, which allowed them to look at fish that were caught locally and inspired them to try cooking with fresh fish.



Cooks discussing which fish is sustainable. Photo: Märta Bergkvist

## Lessons learnt

✓ The safety and hygiene requirements of the school kitchens were revealed to be one of the main issues in the work to increase the amount of fresh fish. Many of the kitchens are not yet allowed to handle fresh fish. It was concluded that cooperation was essential between cooks and the food safety and hygiene inspectors based at the environment department in Malmö in order for more fresh fish to be served in schools.

✓ Cooks who participated in the course were very positive about it and felt that they had learnt something; however they looked forward to a more practical course where they could learn how to cook more different fish dishes with fresh fish.

✓ The experience of Malmö and Rome was that the courses can vary in length and complexity. They can vary from a few hours where sustainability issues are discussed and cooks are introduced to a few different fish or a day of cooking and preparing fish dishes. They can even be longer and more complex with a number of different sessions spread over a number of months.

Information: [malmo.se/volcs](http://malmo.se/volcs)

➤➤ *This example targets cooks. It motivates them to try using fresh fish instead of just frozen. It does not need a lot of investment, and can range from a couple of hours to a whole term of regular training sessions.*

# Cooks Café

*A meeting place for cooks from the public sector organized at regular intervals throughout the term*

**The Cooks café is a recurrent event for cooks in the city of Malmö. It was started by the Environment Department in Malmö. Malmo School Restaurants (MSR) has also been hosting meetings for preschool cooks working in eight preschool kitchens run by MSR.**

MSR have been hosting their meetings during the last year (four times per year). These two groups have, as a result of VoLCS, merged when MSR's preschool cooks have been invited to the Environment Department's Cooks café. So far, three joint Cooks cafés have been held in Malmö with considerable success.

***Cooks invited to Cooks café work in public and private pre-schools as well as elderly care homes and group accommodation in the City of Malmö.*** The cooks working for the City of Malmö all have the same overbridging goals for producing sustainable and tasty food according to Malmö's Policy for sustainable development and food. Cooks are very isolated in their kitchen so the cafés are a great chance to meet each other and exchange ideas.



*The cafés are held 4-6 times a year and always at the environment department who provides the tea and coffee. Cooks get to meet and talk and listen to invited speakers, such as wholesalers.*

*Photo: Phaatoon Sutunyawatchai*

## Why choose this example?

MSR's preschool cooks have a different menu than the cooks from other kitchens in Malmö. In the context of Cooks café this can be seen as an advantage, a possibility to learn and be inspired by how others work and what type of food they cook. This is strongly linked to networking, as the cooks meet across organizations.

The example is also linked to motivation and incentives, as we have learned that it is a tricky task to motivate the cooks to attend Cooks café. The tricky bit is often to get the permission from their manager to attend the meetings during work hours. The motivation from the cooks might be able to rise if the organizers of meetings like these can make the management more aware of their importance.

The Cooks café is also linked to inclusion since MSR's management is represented at the meetings. This makes it possible to make substantial changes in for example menus, if such a need is revealed during Cooks café.



*Cooks café at the Environment Department in Malmö. Photo: Märta Bergkvist*

## How to apply

The Environment Department has been running Cooks café for several years as a response to a direct request from catering staff that they wanted an opportunity to meet with other cooks to discuss common issues.

Malmo School Restaurants have had organized meetings for their school catering staff for many years, but were also interested to know how the meetings that The Environment Department organized were working. The merging of MSR's cooks into The Environment Department's Cooks café was achieved relatively easily. This was because MSR's participant for VoLCS had the direct mandate to invite the preschool cooks from MSR, but participation is voluntary.

The recipe for success in this type of gathering would be, among other factors, to listen to the cooks thoughts on themes/topics/invited guests for the meetings – what is relevant for the cooks from their perspective? It is important to let the cooks set the agenda for these meetings to motivate them to participate in an optimal way. In The City of Malmo there are many courses for cooks that are mandatory – for example topics on food hygiene or special diets – but Cooks café is a place where the cooks are in charge of the agenda. It plays an important role as a fun and motivating place to learn from each other! To develop the networking further, a development could be to invite teachers to joint meetings in the future.



*By meeting and having fun together the cooks create a good relationship with their colleagues and do not have to feel so lonely.  
Photo: Johann Selles*

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ During the meetings, the importance of having time to talk to each other outside of the agenda has been shown. The cooks have lots of things to talk about and value time to talk to each other during for example the coffee break.
- ✓ The main challenge in this activity is to get the cooks to attend the meetings. Meeting attendance is not obligatory for cooks, so they need to see an incentive for their participation. There are many things that compete for their time, and they might not prioritize attending the meetings. However, the opportunity to meet “over borders” can hopefully be appealing for the cooks.
- ✓ To make sure as many cooks as possible can attend this meeting and other ones organized in the same way, a lesson learned is that it is important that the management/boss is aware of the usefulness of meetings like these and give their approval for the cooks to attend.

Information: [malmo.se/volcs](http://malmo.se/volcs)

➤➤ *This example targets cooks. It promotes learning, networking and inclusion. It is easy to organize, does not require any investment, just in coffee! And can be held a number of times during the school year.*

# Ten Dishes

*An example where cooks receive training in mastering ten recipes*

Inspired by the partners in Rome, who in their training sessions let kitchen staff create the same dish ten times in order to successfully master the given dish, Copenhagen House of Food is working on integrating a similar tool into their course work.

The goal is to **train the participants of the course to be able to make ten different dishes to a satisfactory level, each with two or three possible twists**, which should provide the participants with a roster of up to 30 dishes they are able to execute.

Copenhagen House of Food is working on integrating this tool into their "Menu-plan" courses, and are currently discussing which ten dishes should be included.



*Participants learn to make ten different dishes, each with two or three possible twists*

## Why choose this example?

Less experienced course participants could potentially benefit from these easily accessible dishes, which at the same time also provide a relatively large range of possibilities.

As such the approach is believed to be an easy way to learn how to cook, and will in the long run benefit both kitchen staff and the institutions they work for.

At the same time the course participants who successfully master the course could gain motivation and incentives to learn more through the experienced success.



*House of Food working on integrating this tool into their "menu-plan" courses.*

## How to apply

The approach has yet to be carried out, however by integrating this technique into the already existing course-work of Copenhagen House of Food, these methods can be used to focus especially on less experienced participants who need a more simple approach to learning cooking skills.



*These methods can be used to focus on less experienced participants who need a more simple approach to learning cooking skills.*

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ The tool has yet to be tested as it will be integrated in future courses.
- ✓ Copenhagen House of Food has already carried out similar step by step approaches successfully, the advantage of the approach at hand being that instead of focusing on the creation of one stellar dish, the focus is on providing a variety of solid dishes.

Information: [www.en.kbhmadhus.dk](http://www.en.kbhmadhus.dk)

➤➤ *This example is targeted to cooks. It can be used to motivate and is linked learning possibilities. It is inexpensive, simple to implement and can be used both in the short and long term.*

# Kitchen Lift Questionnaire

*Questionnaires to understand problem areas in the first stage of implementing the “Kitchen Lift”*

**Copenhagen House of Food has developed a method for the assessment of the overall quality of the meals served in public institutions.**

The meals of the participating institutions are assessed by consultants from Copenhagen House of Food on the culinary quality, the quality of the produce, the surroundings of the meals, the fit between the meals and the target group and the working environment. ***This method is called the “Kitchen Lift”.***

Copenhagen House of Food has been inspired by the Food for Life Partnership to create questionnaires to be applied prior to these assessments, in order to facilitate a prior understanding of the potential problem areas. This would enable the Copenhagen House of Food culinary advisors to start the discussion with the institutions at a higher level of awareness.



*Important to have a discussion among kitchen staff and the other personnel.*

## **Why choose this example?**

Understanding the problem areas of the meals and the facilities surrounding the meals in a given institution requires rethinking often long-standing traditions and questioning the ways in which the meals are created and served. These discussions often take on a somewhat personal character, as the kitchen staff can feel as if they are being criticised, even though the main point is to help and provide assistance.

By applying a questionnaire prior to the actual assessments, discussions among the kitchen staff and the other personnel at the institutions could be facilitated, thus leading to less intrusion and providing more possibilities of exchanging thoughts.



*Listening to staff to understand the situation.*

## How to apply

The questionnaires have yet to be created but the point of them is not to be able to answer with preformed answers, but rather to create discussion.

As the institutions covered by Copenhagen House of Food are many and diverse, the questionnaires would also have to be adapted to each particular situation in order to be successful.



*It is hoped that the questionnaire answers will create discussion.*

## Lessons learnt

- ✓ The tool has yet to be tested as it will be integrated in future courses.
- ✓ Previous experience with questionnaires has however prepared Copenhagen House of Food to not seek standardization and to rather see this as a preliminary tool to the Kitchen-Lift project.

Information: [www.en.kbhmadhus.dk](http://www.en.kbhmadhus.dk)

➤➤ *This example targets cooks. It can be used to increase learning opportunities, motivate, include and involve. It is inexpensive but requires some investment of time and planning for the questionnaire to be successful.*

# Whole School Approach

*Working towards involving the whole school in education and training relating to the school meal and food in general*

**Copenhagen House of Food has been inspired by the Food for Life Partnership and their whole school approach to start working on a similar integrating approach.**

The goal is to ***integrate the kitchen and the other spheres in the institutions*** to make it a larger part of the everyday life in the institutions.

Also the integration of different institutions is, on the drawing board, for example letting pupils and care home residents share their mealtimes with other groups of people such as staff, family and visitors.



*The goal is to integrate the kitchen and make it a larger part of everyday life in the institutions.*

## Why choose this example?

The overall purpose is to make the mealtime a more integrated part of the everyday life in the institutions and create more understanding and agreement between staff, users and visitors of a given institution.

The way Copenhagen House of Food has been working so far is by assessing, consulting and training, mainly the kitchens of the schools and institutions they work with. A better understanding of the processes of change applied to the kitchen in the institutions however can only be created by bringing together the different parts of the institutions.

Particularly in the integration of school gardens and similar projects, a better understanding of the different elements and parts of a school or institution could be fruitful.



*Copenhagen House of Food has focused so far on kitchens.*

## How to apply

So far some of the aspects of the approach have been applied in other settings, such as “Madskolernes Dag” (The Day of the Food Schools), where care home residents have been invited into their local schools.

The mandate of the Copenhagen House of Food is focused on the meal, wherefore this integration would be applicable in the framework as well. Instead of providing preformed solutions to the potential problems in the kitchen or with the meals, the aim is to better comprehend the entire situation of a given institution and as such improve not only the kitchen, but the institution as a whole.

As Copenhagen House of Food has a mandate to alter the quality of all public meals in Copenhagen, as such, the institutions themselves will have to be motivated to partake in a more integrated approach.



*House of Food has a mandate to alter the quality of all public meals in Copenhagen.*

## Lessons learnt

✓ The tool has yet to be tested.

Information: [www.en.kbhmadhus.dk](http://www.en.kbhmadhus.dk)

➤➤ *This example targets cooks, trainers and policy makers. It covers all of the focus areas. It requires some investment of time and resources. Something that can be worked with throughout the school year.*

# Have you *thought* about...?

**There are many different examples that we have tested and presented here, but there are lots of other things that you can do. Here are a few ideas from us of other things that you can try:**

- ▶ Listen to feedback from catering staff; it is always valuable and new courses and training sessions can be created around these suggestions.
- ▶ Training up staff to cooks, not all those working in kitchens are qualified cooks, offering them the chance to train and become qualified gives you a more motivated, self-confident cook.
- ▶ Never stop offering training to your cooks, be it in basic skills, special diets or competency development.
- ▶ Food and cultural diversity.
- ▶ Create a short film of what goes on in the kitchen and talking about the food produced. It is a powerful tool that can be shown to parents, new staff, children, general public to explain your food policy.
- ▶ Food as an educational tool – targeting teachers/educators.
- ▶ Create a cooks network using the internet allows cooks to communicate with each other and learn from each other and know they are not alone!
- ▶ Do people know what your cooks look like? Take pictures of them and place them up as posters, raising people's awareness of the people preparing their food, and raises cooks status and confidence.
- ▶ Create dialogue with wholesalers and suppliers so they know what you want and can respond better to your needs.
- ▶ Work with the kitchen and customers to reduce food waste and look at the options of recycling the waste.
- ▶ Get children involved by creating a children's council where they can have a voice about the food that is served in their schools.
- ▶ Create event with a local farmer where children and parents can harvest crops together.
- ▶ School gardens are beneficial in so many subjects, encourage your school to have a garden so children can learn how things grow.
- ▶ Many parents complain when their small children come home from nursery with dirty clothes, educate parents about the importance of allowing children to learn to eat by themselves.

