

PRESS INFORMATION



23 May 2012

BRITAIN'S TOP TEN SCHOOL CHEFS CALL FOR ONE SET OF SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS FOR ALL

Britain's top ten School Chefs come together today (Wednesday 23 May) for the National Final of LACA's School Chef of the Year 2012. They have been giving their views on how we can continue to improve the eating habits of children and young people and to increase school meal uptake. They also believe it is essential to safeguard the positive progress made in healthy eating by ensuring one set of compulsory school food standards are applied to all schools regardless of their status or location.

The nation's top ten school chefs gather in Winchester, Hampshire today (Wednesday 23 May) to compete for **LACA's School Chef of the Year 2012** title in what is expected to be a fiercely fought cook off. The National Final takes place for the first time at the Food Services Wing, Defence Logistics School, Worthy Down, Winchester. The Competition is organized annually by **LACA (Local Authority Caterers Association)** and is sponsored by **MAGGI® from Nestlé Professional®**.

The Finalists¹ who come from across England, Wales and Scotland, will battle it out for the school catering industry's top award. They represent the East Midlands; Eastern; London; North East & Scotland; North West; South East; South West; Wales; West Midlands and Yorkshire & Humber (*full list of Finalists and their locations on P4*).

At the frontline of school catering and with first hand experience of the challenges of feeding both children and young people, this year's School Chef of the Year National Finalists have been giving their views as to how to ensure they continue to benefit from healthy, affordable school meals. They have also outlined their tips and recommendations for increasing the take up of both paid and free school meals:

- Listen to students and adapt to what they are asking for. School caterers are up against competition from the High Street so with 'grab and go' popular for teenagers create enticing, healthy 'fast food' which is not 'junk food'. Keep seeking their views and opinions
- Training children's taste buds begins at home so it is important to catch them whilst they are young in order acquaint them with new flavours and new foods. Sampling new foods in the early years is vital so it is important for fresh food to be cooked well at home.

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- Increase nutritional education for parents to guide them about providing a healthy balanced diet for their children at home. Schools need to do more to engage and educate parents about food and cooking through tastings and cookery lessons. Those schools which involve pupils in cooking, report that this has led to an increase in school meal uptake, especially where parents have also taken part.
- Increase the number and frequency of after school clubs to improve food and cookery knowledge. They should be seen as just as important as those for curriculum subjects like maths or science.
- With many more families becoming eligible for Free School Meals as a result of the economic situation, parents should be encouraged to take advantage of their entitlement so that children have a chance of a hot nutritious meal every day particularly at a time when they can be more vulnerable. To overcome any perceived stigma or negativity, parents should be invited into schools to try the meals themselves. Despite all the publicity about school meal improvements, the School Chefs believe that many parents are still unaware of how much choice and how many healthy, tasty options children have available to them in school today.
- A good relationship between Head Teachers and the catering service is vital to ensure a healthy eating policy is applied throughout the school to encourage young people to choose better food and drink options for themselves so that they are discouraged from bringing into school those items banned under Nutritional Standards.
- The School Chefs also want to see a level playing field with the same mandatory school food standards applying to all schools nationwide regardless of their status otherwise they fear all their hard work will be undone and the trend towards healthier eating will go into reverse.

Demonstrating their cooking skills as well as how healthy and creative school meals are, is therefore important to all school chefs which is why they feel taking part in the School Chef of the Year event is such a great opportunity to show just how much school meals have changed for the better.

This annual competition really puts their preparation, cooking, creativity and presentation skills to the test. Each entrant is required to produce, in just one and a half hours, a healthy balanced two-course meal comprising of a main course and dessert that would appeal to eleven year olds in school. A maximum of £1.50p is allowed for the cost of a single meal (i.e. main course and dessert) for one child.

With school menus having to reflect popular themes from worldwide cuisine in order to appeal to today's discerning youngsters, Nestlé Professional® has included an extensive selection of its products in the competition basket to help contestants' enhance the creativity of their menus such as a choice of MAGGI® Rich & Rustic, MAGGI® Gravy mixes and new MAGGI® Mash, as well as MAGGI® Béchamel Sauce, and MAGGI® Demi Glace Sauce too. (A full list of MAGGI products is provided in the Notes to Editors). At least one of these products is required in the main course of the contestant's menu for the Competition.

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Influences and flavours from the Orient and Asia to Latin America and the Caribbean dominate the National Final menus this year. An exciting line up of highly creative and mouth watering dishes packed with imaginative twists will impress the judges today.

Chair of the Judging Panel at the 2012 National Final is Justin Clarke, Food Development Chef for MAGGI® at Nestlé Professional®. Also on the Judging Panel is a professional chef judge (WO1 Jon Gray, British Army Culinary Arts Team, Food Services Wing, Worthy Down), a local authority catering professional (Kathleen Jones, Local Authority Caterers Association), a leading dietician (Jasmine Challis, British Dietetic Association), the 2011 School Chef of the Year, Louise Witterick from Solihull and an 11 year old boy and girl (Katy Davis and Fredrick ('Charlie') Black from South Wonston Primary School, nr Winchester, Hampshire).

Lynda Mitchell, LACA Chair says: "LACA's School Chef of the Year continues to represent a highly positive way of communicating the benefits of supporting a high quality school meals service in order to combat obesity and help safeguard the health of the next generation. The School Chef of the Year judging criteria are tough but the skills and standards demonstrated by all the participants across the country, send a clear message to all of our customers - from Head Teachers and Governors to parents and young people. And that is, our talented front line staff in schools not only prepare tasty, highly creative dishes to tempt the taste buds of discerning children and young people but also nutritious school meals that can make a major contribution towards altering eating habits, improving diets and decreasing obesity levels".

Adding his comments, **Neil Stephens , Managing Director, Nestlé Professional®** says: "With so many demands from the industry, parents and children, it's not easy for school chefs today, which is why it's so important that training and development initiatives like School Chef of the Year get the full industry backing they deserve. Competitions like School Chef of the Year are a great opportunity to showcase the skills and dedication of those talented individuals who work tirelessly to feed our children and young people and in many cases, make a positive contribution towards improving diets and eating habits. This is just one of the reasons why we are proud to be a partner and sponsor of this competition year after year."

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Notes to Editors:

- ¹ The 10 National Finalists are:
- East Midlands School Chef of the Year 2012*
Karen Broom, Eckington Secondary School, Sheffield (Derbyshire CC)
 - Eastern School Chef of the Year 2012*
Wendy Kemp, Malvern Way Infant & Nursery School, Croxley Green (Herts CC)
 - London School Chef of the Year 2012*
Sharon Taylor, St Giles Special School, Croydon (LB of Croydon)
 - North East & Scotland School Chef of the Year 2012*
Carol Coupland, Irvine Royal Secondary Academy, Irvine (N Ayrshire C)
 - North West School Chef of the Year 2012*
Mark Holmes, Abraham Guest High School, Wigan (Wigan MBC)
 - South East School Chef of the Year 2012*
Alison Gann, Claverham Secondary Community College, Battle (E Sussex CC)
 - South West School Chef of the Year 2012*
Tasha Watts, Crispin Secondary School, Street (Somerset CC)
 - Welsh School Chef of the Year 2012*
Emma Williams, Sir Thomas Picton Secondary School, Haverfordwest (Pembrokeshire CC)
 - West Midlands School Chef of the Year 2012*
Karen Coffey, John Baskeyfield C of E Primary School, Stoke on Trent (Stoke on Trent CC)
 - Yorks & Humber School Chef of the Year 2012*
Audrey Harris, St Bede's Secondary School, Scunthorpe (North Lincs C)

About LACA's School Chef of the Year Competition, sponsored by Maggi from Nestlé Professional

- LACA's School Chef of the Year Competition is the industry's premier culinary event exclusively for those in the education catering sector. The Competition aims to showcase high standards of skill, creativity and professionalism amongst school caterers. The Competition is open to all kitchen based staff employed by organisations that are full members of LACA and are involved with the daily preparation of school meals.
- There are eight different judging criteria that apply at all stages of the Competition. These are: Flavours, Colours and Textures; Food Presentation; Working Practices; Creativity, Composition and Service; Use of Regional/Seasonal Produce/Nestlé Products; Ability to Replicate En Masse; Nutritional Balance and Service Counter Marketing. Contestants must include ingredients that reflect seasonal availability and that have been sourced locally or typify the contestant's region. Contestants' menus will have been inspired by both traditional and cultural influences as well as the availability of fresh local produce
- The overall winner of the national title will receive the 2012 LACA School Chef of the Year trophy. Two other prizes - Highly Commended Main Course and Highly Commended Dessert will be awarded at the discretion of the judges. The National Winner will also receive a cash prize of £500, a special commemorative plaque, a vocational training opportunity and invitations to a calendar of high profile catering industry events between 2012 - 2013. Winners of the Highly Commended Main Course or Highly Commended Dessert classes will each receive £100 and a special commemorative plaque.

About MAGGI® and Nestlé Professional®

Brought to you by Nestlé Professional®, MAGGI®'s range of culinary aids bring out the best in fresh and natural ingredients helping you put more flavour in every dish. The MAGGI® range, which includes stocks, sauces, soups, offers a quick and easy way to create healthier, more varied and delicious menus in minutes.

Competition Basket - Products

Maggi Rich & Rustic Tomato Sauce, Maggi Instant Mashed Potato, Maggi Bechamel, Maggi Demi Glace, Maggi Dark Vegetarian Gravy, Carnation Condensed Milk Light, Carnation Evaporated Milk Light

About LACA

LACA (Local Authority Caterers Association) is the leading professional body representing 750 Catering Managers in local authorities, private contractors and individual schools who are providers of school meal service within primary and secondary schools throughout England, Wales and Scotland. There are also 350 Associate Members who are leading suppliers of food, drink, equipment and services to the school catering sector. With 135 Local Authorities represented in the membership, 80% of the catering service is provided by LACA Members and with around 3 million lunches being served every day in 22,000 schools, the LACA network is the country's largest provider of school catering. For more information, visit www.laca.co.uk