



LACA
SCHOOL CHEF OF THE YEAR 2026
SCOTy★
SPONSORED BY **aaah! BISTO**

Supported by
The Worshipful Company of Cooks of London



Erin Ward, SCOTY 2025 winner



LACA SCHOOL CHEF OF THE YEAR 2026

COMPETITION RULES AND ENTRY CRITERIA

PLEASE READ THIS INFORMATION CAREFULLY

REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR LACA SCHOOL CHEF OF THE YEAR 2026

Sponsored by Bisto

With the competition focus on producing nutritious, delicious meals for 11 year old primary or secondary school pupils, the LACA School Chef of the Year competition is the perfect showcase for passionate school chefs to demonstrate what they do best every day.

Competitors must prepare, cook and present four portions of a main course and dessert with a total food cost of £1.75 per head in 90 minutes that meet the School Food Standards and Eat Well Guide.

The search for the LACA School Chef of the Year 2026 is underway and LACA are delighted to be partnering once again with the Bisto Brand of Premier Foods as sponsor of SCOTY 2026.

Brad Pearce, LACA National Chair says:

This showcase event which starts with our school chefs competing in their own regional cook offs, with the regional winners joining the final competition live at the Main Event in July 2026.

It is an amazing experience for all those that take part, enabling our amazing staff to showcase their incredible talent and creativity. Participants are able to meet and network with school chefs from across the country at both the regional and national stage, and it's the perfect opportunity to demonstrate their passion and professionalism. I can't wait to follow the action from the regional heats through to the Main Event Final. Best of luck to you all

Sadia Allam, Foodservice Channel Controller at Premier Foods says: "LACA School Chef of the Year remains one of the most anticipated events in the school catering calendar, and we're delighted that Bisto is once again sponsoring the competition this year.

We'll be supporting and celebrating every chef who takes part, and we're excited to join the judging panel as we search for the next standout talent in school meals. Our Premier Foods foodservice team works closely with chefs across the UK, and we'll be encouraging as many as possible to get involved and submit an entry. It's a fantastic opportunity to challenge yourself, grow your skills, and potentially shine a spotlight on your school."



Register here: www.laca.co.uk/scoty



2026 COMPETITION SCHEDULE

- July 2025 – registrations open.
- Tuesday 6th January 2026 – final date for registrations.
- Friday 30th January 2026 – deadline for full entries to be returned to competition organisers.
- 12th and 13th February 2026 – paper judging of all entries. Regional finalists to be notified w/c 16th February.
- March, April and May – regional finals, dates and locations tbc.
- Tuesday 7th and Wednesday 8th July 2026 – National Final at the LACA Main Event, Hilton Birmingham Metropole. The winner will be announced at the LACA Awards dinner on Wednesday 8th July 2026.

PRIZES

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| ■ EACH REGIONAL FINAL winner will receive a prize of £100 | ■ NATIONAL FINAL Winner £1,000 cash prize plus work experience trip |
| ■ NATIONAL FINAL 2nd Place £500 cash prize | ■ NATIONAL FINAL 3rd Place £300 cash prize |
| ■ In addition, each National Final prize winner will be given the chance to work with the Premier Foods Culinary Team on their recipe and product development. | |

ENTRY PROCESS

Register here: www.laca.co.uk/scoty



Step 1 - Register your interest

Register for the competition online at www.laca.co.uk/scoty
This must be received by the organisers no later than Tuesday 6th January 2026.

Step 2 - Submit your entry

- Download all entry forms from the website www.laca.co.uk/scoty
- Complete the entrant details, recipe method and costing sheets forms and the allergen checklist document, and submit to the organisers.
- This must give all ingredients and costs used in the main course and dessert and include pictures of both courses served on plates for competition presentation and shown en masse in the school kitchen environment.
- The main course must include one Bisto product from the list provided. Competitors are permitted to use more than one Premier Foods product in their main course if it suits the dish. The dessert should be based on 50% fruit content and include one item from the list of Premier Foods dessert products provided.
- You will also need to show how the recipes reflect the School Food Standards and the 2016 Eat Well Guide and to answer the questions set out in point 11 of the competition rules.
- **Your entry must be received by the organisers no later than Friday 30th January 2026.**

Step 3 - Paper judging

Judges will review all entries to establish that they are school compliant and reflect competition rules. Feedback on all entries received will be sent via the managers. Regional finalists will be advised by email in February 2026.

Step 4 - Regional Finals

Regional finals will be held across the country in March, April and May 2026, exact dates and locations tbc.

The judging panel at the regional finals will consist of the Premier Foods judge as Chair of Judges, a LACA chef judge and an independent professional chef judge.

Guidelines for Regional Heats:

- Competitors will be expected to travel to the chosen location for their regional final.
- Two SCOTy badges will be provided by the competition organiser and should be sewn onto uniforms for media coverage, one on a sleeve and one on the breast pocket area.
- Competitors must provide all ingredients (including the sponsor products being used), knives, light equipment or speciality equipment and all serving plates or dishes which are required to produce their dishes.
- Competitors should be aware that judges will be talking to them throughout the competition about their dishes.

Step 5 - National Final

The 10 regional finalists and up to 2 judges' wild card competitors will compete in the National Final at the LACA Main Event on Tuesday 7th and Wednesday 8th July 2026.

The format for this will be as per the regional finals with additions to the judging panel which will include the current LACA School Chef of the Year and a representative from the Worshipful Company of Cooks of London.

The winner will be announced at the LACA Awards Dinner on Wednesday 8th July 2026.

At all levels of the competition, the Chair of Judge's decision is final and no correspondence can be entered into.

Useful links to help you and your chefs create your dishes suitable for an 11 year old pupil:

The portions of your meal must be in line with School Food Plan <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/>

Your meal must reflect the 2016 EAT WELL GUIDE <http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eatwell/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide>

To find out more about Bisto and Premier Foods products <http://www.premierfoodservice.co.uk>

Eatwell Guide for reference:



JUDGING CRITERIA 2026

At the regional and national finals, Judges will be assessing the entries based on the criteria below. All entries start with maximum points so by keeping as close to these criteria when devising your entries, you will increase your potential score.

MARKS AVAILABLE PER DISH
10

Use of Premier Foods products

- The main course must include one Bisto product from the list provided. Competitors are permitted to use more than one Premier Foods product in their main course if it suits the dish.
- The dessert should be based on 50% fruit content and include one item from the list of Premier Foods dessert products provided.
- Innovation / application.
- Knowledge of product.
- Quantity of product used in recipe and where used.
- Have the sponsor's products been used in the meal in a substantial way?

MARKS AVAILABLE PER ENTRY
20

Working Practices in the Kitchen

- Time plan.
- Cooking methods as submitted.
- Organisation of work flow.
- Knife skills.
- Correct use of chopping boards and knives as per universal code.
- Use of probes (correct knowledge of core cooking temperatures).
- Food hygiene practices eg use of sanitiser.
- Personal hygiene (clean and tidy, hair tied back and covered, no jewellery, correct use of PPE etc)
- Food storage.
- Minimum wastage, no over production.

Register here: www.laca.co.uk/scoty



MARKS AVAILABLE PER DISH
10

Creativity and Appearance

- Description of dish matches taste.
- Portion size; relevance to age group in accordance with the School Food Standards.
- Eat Well Guide followed.
- Balance of ingredients.
- Appealing to eye.
- Suitable garnish for meal.
- Use of sustainable products.
- Use of local products.

MARKS AVAILABLE PER DISH
10

Taste and Flavour

- Originality of dish.
- Balance between main course and dessert.
- Flavours and ingredients work together.
- Variety of textures.
- Seasoning.
- Relevance to age group in accordance with the School Food Standards eg low in salt and sugar.

MARKS AVAILABLE PER ENTRY
5

NEW FOR 2026

LACA are supporting the Bang in some Beans campaign which aims to double bean consumption in the UK by 2028.

Competitors are encouraged to add beans or pulses to their recipe, in addition to meat, fish or other alternative protein sources. Up to five points will be available at the regional and national final stage for entries which include beans or pulses in their main course in the most imaginative and creative ways.

COMPETITION RULES 2026

Please read these rules carefully as there have been some changes for this year.

These rules apply at all levels of the competition. Breach of these will result in contestants being disqualified or points deducted from their score.

1. The competition is open to all staff that hold a kitchen-based post and who are involved in the daily preparation of pupils' meals at the time of entry. Contestants may work in more than one kitchen as a mobile chef but must be on the salary grade of kitchen manager or lower. **Management, area managers, training managers or development chefs are not eligible to enter.**
2. Entries may be submitted by any school meal provider, whether a local authority, contract caterer, academy or free school.
3. The competition is open to non members of LACA. If a non-member reaches the regional final of the competition, they must become a member to continue.
4. A previous national winner cannot enter a second time.
5. You will be required to produce four portions of a main course and dessert suitable for 11 year old pupils (year 6 primary or year 7 secondary). Meal produced **MUST** comply with the SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS and take into account the EAT WELL GUIDE 2016 and follow the judging criteria.
6. Cost per head must not exceed £1.75 for one main course and one dessert (£6.80 for four main courses and four desserts). The standard ingredient cost sheet **MUST** be used for all costings. Ingredients not on this list can be used but must be priced appropriately, evidence of pricing must be provided. Ingredients sourced from a school garden or allotment should also be costed in. Any disposable items used in the dishes should be included in the costings eg cake cases, kebab skewers.
7. All elements of the dish must be freshly prepared on the day of the competition and judges will check this prior to the commencement of the competition cooking time. Judges will be spot checking ingredient weights and a bowl will be provided to all contestants for any food production waste.
8. The main course should be presented on **plain white china plates**, either round or square. Desserts should be presented on dishes that reflect the recipe. All main course dish elements must be served on the plate; a small jug or dish of sauce can accompany the main course.
9. Competition time is 90 minutes to prepare, cook and present four portions of each dish.
10. The main course must include ONE Bisto product from the list provided. Competitors are permitted to use more than one Premier Foods product in their main course if it suits the dish. The dessert should be based on 50% fruit content and include a minimum of ONE item from the list of Premier Foods products provided. The products used must form a substantial and innovative part of the finished dish. Foodservice packs should be used, not the retail equivalent.
11. A written explanation will be required to include the following:
(maximum 150 words).
This information will be displayed with your dishes at the regional finals.
 - What inspired you to create the dishes?
 - The reasoning behind the product application of the Bisto/Premier Foods products.
 - What changes to the ingredients, method or skills would need to be made when the menu is produced en masse?Contestants should be prepared to discuss their Rule 11 submission with the judges at the regional and national finals.
12. Allergen information for the meal should be completed using the FSA form included with the entry forms.
13. The following photographs **MUST** be provided:
 - One each of the main course and dessert plated for presentation in the competition.
 - Photographs showing a minimum of 20 portions of each dish served en masse, as you would serve in your dining room/hatch. These will be made available to be viewed at the regional and national finals.
14. Recipe, costs and method of preparation need to be provided at paper entry level and the dishes produced at regional and national heats must adhere to these.
15. National Finalists will be permitted to make changes to their recipe, costings and method following judges' feedback after the regional finals. Amended entry forms **MUST** be re-submitted before the national final showing the changes made, including pictures if required.
16. Competitors who reach the National Final must provide their recipes and method scaled up to 10 portions for use in the sponsor's recipe book. Guidelines will be provided.
17. At all stages throughout the competition a scoring sheet will be used by the judges to encompass the criteria as set out in the rules.
18. At the regional finals, competitors should reflect the dress code of their employer. Uniforms will be provided for each competitor for the national final.
19. Employers will be responsible for overnight accommodation and travel expenses for competitors and any other staff attending regional cook off heats if required.
20. The Chair of Judge's decision is final and no correspondence may be entered into. Verbal feedback will be given to competitors on the day of the competition.
21. There will be up to two judge's wild card entries chosen from the regional finals who will be invited to compete at the national final in July 2026. These will be notified after all regional finals have taken place.
22. The National winner will be required to attend regional events and media coverage. Employers should be prepared to release winner from day job.
23. The competition winner is not permitted to represent a supplier company, other than Premier Foods, in their year as LACA School Chef of the Year.