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Evaluation of Good Food Training for London

Executive Summary
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Michelle Wu, MSc michelle.wu.1@city.ac.uk

Dr Martin Caraher, PhD martin.caraher@city.ac.uk*

Centre for Food Policy
School of Community and Health Sciences
City University London

*For enquiries contact

Good Food Training for London



Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the final report from the evaluation of the Good Food Training for London (GFTL) Project, which was funded by the London Development Agency (LDA) and delivered by a partnership of organisations including Sustain and NHS Greenwich, managed by the Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency (GCDA). The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Food Policy at City University London between May 2008 and August 2009 and sets out the implementation of the two-year GFTL pilot, documenting the Project's progress in achieving its stated objectives, the challenges it has encountered, and the learning that has resulted.

The evaluation comes at a time when review of the standards informing hospitality and catering qualifications is underway and the Government prepares to introduce its voluntary 'Healthier Food Mark' scheme to encourage public sector to lead by example in the delivery of healthier, more sustainable food.

The Project

As one of four main projects supporting the implementation of the London Food Strategy, GFTL's primary driver was to increase training and skills levels in the public sector in order to achieve healthier and more sustainable food and procurement. The Project has delivered training, both accredited and bespoke, in the form of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), short and long courses, training days, and specialist events. It has delivered across a wide range of organisations and settings, to participants in diverse roles including catering, procurement, education and social care.

The objectives of the GFTL Project were to:

1. Develop the skills level of public sector caterers in London to help ensure that good quality, healthy food is served consistently.
2. Provide considerable health benefits to Londoners, including school children and hospital patients, by improving the nutritional quality of public food and implementing the whole-school approach in schools.
3. Increase use of healthy and sustainable food within the public sector to meet the London Food Strategy's objectives regarding healthy and sustainable food procurement.
4. Help to reduce the environmental impact of London's food system by promoting the purchasing of more sustainable food.
5. Provide benefits to the London economy by promoting more local and regional procurement.

Methods

Four main activities were conducted to inform the evaluation:

Summary of evaluation activities

Activity	Notes
Desk research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis and review of the literature evaluating similar training initiatives (or training components in multi-component interventions)• Review of documented good practice in public sector catering within the UK, including some site visits
Participant questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post-course feedback captured for 1265 learners on their perceived change in knowledge and skills and supports/barriers to changing practice in the workplace• Additional 10 children completed pre/post questionnaires evaluating the impact of summer school programme on eating and cooking habits, attitudes and food preferences
In depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face-to-face interviews with 20 training participants in their workplace• Interviews with 3 Project tutors, conducted face-to-face and via telephone• Synthesis of interviews with questionnaire findings
Stakeholder research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visits to participating provider organisations and learner workplaces; stakeholders interviewed informally during fieldwork or via telephone• Observation of training and events

Key Findings

Implementation

Due to various factors, the direction of the Project changed throughout its implementation. As a result, it did not carry out some of the activities originally anticipated but took a delivery approach that best facilitated achieving its output targets while remaining responsive to participants, organisations and local circumstances. Key factors affecting implementation included: the type and definition of output targets required by the funding body; a gap in nutrition and sustainability expertise in mainstream catering

training providers; and limited engagement with head teachers and contract caterers.

Impact of training activities

Developing skills in public sector caterers (and related roles)

- Where there was *interest* in nutrition there was often greater awareness and reported change in personal food purchasing and/or preparation behaviours after training. However, for most catering staff changing practice in the workplace was not possible due to lack of control over menus and purchasing decisions.
- Food safety, food presentation and customer care were areas in which catering staff felt most able to apply what was learned from the training to their jobs.
- Learners with a higher degree of autonomy in their jobs were most often in a position to change both their own practice and influence organisational changes (e.g., change in supplier). These interviewees were usually able to talk about ideas they had and how the new knowledge would be applied, even if the opportunity to do so had not yet occurred.

Raising awareness and knowledge of healthy eating and nutrition in parents, and school teaching and support staff

- Parents are able and usually willing to try to make changes in how they shop and prepare food in the home.
- Depending on available opportunities, funding, and personal motivation, some parents were able to influence decisions around school food as governors or as volunteers contributing to cookery clubs or other initiatives promoting healthy eating and healthy weight. In general, parents did not have easy access to funding for such programmes and those interviewed welcomed the training provided by the Project.
- Low participation by teachers in healthy eating & nutrition training.
- The Open College Network (OCN) course in Healthy Eating and Running a Cookery Club has been particularly useful for those working in the community who would otherwise not have access to training in nutrition or food preparation. Many of these learners work with families or vulnerable groups in the community and took part in the course as it would provide the skills and knowledge needed to run cookery clubs in these populations.

Increasing the use of sustainable food within the public sector and increasing awareness and understanding of sustainable catering practices

- Actual take up of purchasing practices to increase the use of sustainable food has been limited.
- Where there has been progress or efforts to increase the use of sustainable food, there has been leadership, practical support and commitment of time and resources. A previous or ongoing relationship with Sustain, or other purchasing support, has also helped.
- The specialist sustainable food events were well attended, with high levels of interest in all the subjects presented.

- The specialist events were an effective platform from which to educate and engage with those who are able to advocate and advance the sustainable food agenda within their organisations.

Other Project activities

- Good Food Summer School.
- Delivery of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and short courses to catering staff and inmates at HMP Holloway.
- Food growing training delivered in schools and prisons, with development of an accredited Food Growing tutor course underway.
- Advocacy and building relationships with key organisations and initiatives that are well-placed to improve the nutrition and sustainability of food in the public sector in the longer term.

Main Challenges and Lessons Learned

In many ways, the lessons learned are as valuable to the evaluation and indeed to the Project as the impacts achieved. Key challenges included the gap in nutrition and sustainability expertise within mainstream catering training providers; varying levels of commitment to the values and objectives of GFTL in beneficiary organisations; difficulty engaging key stakeholder groups; reliance on a 'champion' within organisations for effective training promotion and participant recruitment; and a lack of understanding by the funding body of the sectors targeted, reflected in the type of output targets required. Overall engagement by the LDA was limited during the Project implementation period.

Looking at the wider context, a key barrier to achieving healthier and more sustainable food and procurement is that there is no requirement for public sector catering services to have appropriately informed sustainability standards or training to that effect. Other key barriers were that sustainable food was widely perceived to cost more and require additional effort to purchase (e.g., identifying suppliers, conducting audits, etc.) Without the resources and internal systems to support these changes, it was a challenge even for participants whose values were aligned with the Project as they often had little extra time to devote.

Recommendations

The experience of GFTL suggests that traditional hospitality and catering training (e.g., NVQs) may not fully address the needs specific to public sector food provision. Furthermore, current NVQs in catering do not incorporate health and sustainability considerations.

While we believe that NVQs should remain within the further education (FE) sector, GFTL is uniquely placed to provide an alternative to traditional catering training and to inform the development of future provision. Specifically, GFTL may be able to 'fill the gap' in four important and under resourced areas:

1. Training provision, with an emphasis on bespoke training, for opted out schools and other independent, small-scale catering services in the public sector.
2. Training provision, with an emphasis on bespoke training, for parents and community based workers without access to nutrition training.
3. Advisor to the FE sector and Sector Skills Councils on the development of accredited sustainable catering training and resources.
4. Advocacy for sustainability in the hospitality and catering training sector and for change at the contractual level through the London Food Board, LDA, and Government Office for London.