

# Organising and managing a food tasting session

## Why have food tasting sessions?

When developing new or modifying standardised recipes, it is important to remember that the customer (pupil) likes and dislikes are key. Modifying and introducing new recipes to enhance the nutrient density of the overall menu will only be successful if the pupils like these dishes. Therefore, when making any changes, it is a good idea to provide taster pots/portions for pupils to try and provide feedback regarding customer acceptability.

## What will you need?

- Standardised recipes
- Catering team / support staff with a food hygiene certificate
- Taster pots
- Appropriate cutlery
- Communication appropriate feedback sheets
- Consent forms / information sheets for parents
- Awareness of allergies

The timing and venue of the tasting sessions are dependent on the individual needs of pupils. The school dining area is usually a very busy and noisy environment, and therefore some pupils may find it difficult to concentrate on tasting the food and providing feedback, while others may enjoy the experience. For those pupils who require a quieter environment, a tasting session could be delivered during a non lunch period, e.g. in a classroom during the morning or afternoon session.

Parents should be informed of the forthcoming tasting session; this could be done in a letter which should include information on why the tasting session is happening and which foods will be provided. If not already known, parents should be encouraged to share any information on food allergies which would prevent their child taking part. Parents should always be given the option for their child to opt out of the activity.

## Organising and managing a food tasting session (continued)

It is important to include pupils with a variety of different needs in the tasting session, e.g. those requiring modified consistency meals and those who self-limit their oral intake. This promotes inclusion and offers each pupil a voice. Obtaining feedback from a broad spectrum of pupils provides useful information on acceptability of new menu items.

Pupils should be provided with a feedback sheet that is appropriate to their communication style. For example, a simple, 'Do you like? Yes / No' question or a picture option chart.

### Outcomes

The main outcome of any tasting session is to assess the acceptability of new or modified recipes. If the new / modified recipes are liked by the pupils, then they can be added to the full menu. If they are not deemed acceptable, then the recipes can be further modified and then trialled at another tasting session.