

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

The sustainability message has become well and truly engrained at the University of Brighton and its hospitality team is playing a critical role in encouraging staff and students to live healthier, greener lives



'Five years ago people would have said it's too expensive. It's second nature now and the costs are coming down.'

The 'it' in question is a commitment to sustainability and Julie Barker, director of accommodation and hospitality services at University of Brighton, can point to her team's latest award as evidence.

Brighton scooped the university/college category at the Cost Sector Catering Awards for its successful business growth – proof that there doesn't have to be a trade off between profit and a green ethos. This followed on from winning a Catey for sustainable business in 2016.

Across its 19 outlets and three campuses in Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings, the sustainability message is constantly reinforced, whether it's the emphasis on locally sourced food or its Love Food Hate Waste campaign.

The university was the first higher education institution to achieve Sustainable Restaurant Association accreditation. The SRA developed a specific model for the sector in partnership with TUCO, an initiative driven by Julie during her time as TUCO chair.

She claims no credit for Brighton's success in the scheme or indeed other awards successes during her tenure as chair, saying she merely 'pushed my team in that direction'.

The key to the hospitality team's success, she says, has been the university's 'whole institution' approach that's underpinned by an overarching sustainable development strategy covering everything from practices on campus to travel, ethical investment and procurement.

And while the scale and scope of the strategy might sound highly ambitious, perhaps even overwhelming, on a practical level the hospitality team has implemented it in an organic way.

'We have been focusing on one subject area at a time rather than trying to dilute things too much. Things have flowed from that,' Julie explains.

'Once you have embedded the sustainability message the spin offs become quite easy. For example, our Field to Fork project linked our procurement strategy to local purchasing of produce and then to our work on healthy eating.' The latter has seen the launch of Sugar

Smart, a campaign to encourage students and staff to reduce their sugar intake.

The university introduced a 10p levy on drinks with high sugar content while increasing the range of healthier options and cutting the cost of drinks that contain less than five grams of sugar per 100ml, including bottled water.

Between 2015-16 it saw year on year sales of sugary drinks fall by 16% while maintaining the same volume of transactions. The success has captured the attention of academics at the university who are now interested in researching the initiative.

'There's an element of menu engineering and product placement and pricing. But we've also used surveys to better understand what students are eating and drinking and what options they'd like to see.

'We've found that in terms of our student meal deal they actually prefer a sandwich, fruit and water.'

Sugary drinks will always be sold on campus because, as Julie points out, there's no way of knowing what students are eating off campus. But she believes



SPEND THROUGH TUCO FRAMEWORKS

TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£1.46m
CASH SAVINGS	£150,000
PROCESS SAVINGS	£12,000
TUCO ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION	£100
TOTAL NET SAVINGS	£162,000



UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

21,000 students

2,800 staff

170 hospitality and catering staff

£4.9m catering and conference turnover

19 hospitality outlets

universities have a responsibility – and an opportunity – to change behaviour.

‘We supported the Sugar Smart initiative acknowledging that there is a generation of kids that have no knowledge of food nutrition since the subject was removed from the national curriculum. Some of those people are now parents themselves.

‘A number of things have collided with the curriculum issue – the growth of fast food and ready meals have all driven the societal changes we have seen and have now. So many people are reliant on manufactured food and have no knowledge around “real” food.

‘I wanted us to lead the way because our customers are our future and their age group is embracing issues around sustainability.’

For the next academic year her team are engaging customers to significantly reduce the number of paper cups sent to landfill by 25% – which equates to 125,000 – by introducing the university’s reusable MyCup initiative. It is also focusing on increasing the range and variety of plant based foods on offer and promoting climate friendly menu choices in response to student feedback.

As budgets of both institutions and their students become increasingly squeezed, could the sustainability agenda lose momentum?

Brighton has sought to ensure that doesn’t happen by putting safeguards in place. For example, every hospitality outlet has a sustainability champion tasked with making sure policies are followed and new initiatives are successfully implemented.

It includes simple measures, such as putting signs next to every piece of equipment asking whether it needs to be switched on. It’s a way to combat the ‘traditional chef habit’ of turning everything on the minute they arrive in the kitchen, says Julie.

And she’s confident there will be no retreat.

‘Sustainability is a marketing tool. It’s big on the university’s agenda – as it is with a number of universities – and we all have to be on message. It’s been step by step, based around priorities and cost savings.

‘We need to be more mindful of the budgets for students. Very good value, cost-effective, sustainable and nutritionally balanced meals with a focus on education – that’s where we should be going.’

ABOUT TUCO

TUCO is the leading professional membership body for in-house caterers operating in the higher and further education sector and is used by universities and colleges throughout the UK. It provides a platform where members can Share and celebrate achievements; Learn via a range of courses, professional advice, training and study tours; Grow their business through latest market research, trends and analysis; and Buy via TUCO’s EU compliant catering frameworks and wide range of suppliers – maximising value through the combined £150m annual spend of TUCO members.

Find out more about TUCO

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TUCO
The University Caterers Organisation