

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE: CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Cardiff University's delivered hospitality service team, which scooped Team of the Year at the recent TUCO Awards, has been a big hit in a short space of time. It's all down to attention to detail and ensuring customers and staff are fully engaged...



It sounds like the university catering world's equivalent of mission impossible: set up a new team and service from scratch in the space of nine weeks. The team's task – to offer a highly responsive service delivering a variety of top quality buffets across a multitude of sites. The objective – to win back lost custom and spearhead a brand new catering strategy.

Cardiff University's delivered hospitality service shows it's possible to overcome numerous challenges if you do your homework and keep striving for improvements.

Launched in January, the service has already achieved a tenfold rise in turnover compared with its predecessor.

'Our customer base is internal staff and there was a lot of revenue going out of the university to external catering companies,' explains Annabel Hurst, head of catering and foodservice. 'We've now returned nearly all of that back in house.'

Whether it's a meeting of 10 people or a full-blown lunch for 200, it is now the delivered hospitality service team that staff across the university turn to.

The team covers sites spread over a 10-mile radius, often dealing with last minute bookings and frequently requested at the same time.

As Annabel describes in the team's winning entry to the TUCO Awards: 'Delivering exemplary customer service, always smiling, even in the face of eight buffets per van all to be delivered at 12pm, lifts not working and no tables provided to set up on!'

So what happened during those crucial nine weeks to create such a success story? The new service is part of a strategy designed to raise standards and ensure catering plays a leading role in the university's wider success. Prior to its launch, this side of the business involved two drivers



delivering a few small buffets produced by the main restaurant kitchen.

It now has a dedicated team comprising a kitchen manager and three chefs based in the Central Production Unit – a 15-minute drive from the university's central base – along with an overarching manager, five drivers and two admin staff who deal with bookings. There's also someone to deal with dispatches who checks orders before they go out and when they come back and picks up feedback, and the latest addition – someone to oversee logistics.

'We devised new menus and went into the different Schools with sample buffets to get their feedback and do sales pitches,' says Annabel. 'Communication is key and we now send out regular surveys and have lots of meetings with customers. We have

Delivered Hospitality Service

Delivered hospitality turnover increased by 1,100% between 2016-17 and 2017-18

5,000 miles are covered every week

Average number of cups of coffee made each week: 6,000

Between 12pm and 1pm the service typically delivers a buffet every two minutes



worked hard to change pre-conceived ideas of the quality of delivered hospitality from previous experiences and win back their trade.

'That's what we've done and we're getting positive feedback because customers appreciate the flexibility and variety we offer.

She adds: 'One of our biggest challenges is logistics. We spent a lot of time learning drivers' routes and understanding each building in terms of access. The university has a lot of older buildings with corridors and stairs. We use crockery, not disposables, so it's a major consideration.

'Delivery times and getting into rooms to clear up afterwards are something we're constantly working on. Customers often want deliveries at the same time and there's high demand for meeting rooms so we have a short window to make collections.'

As part of the wider catering strategy, the service also benefits from a more streamlined approach to procurement and extensive use of TUCO frameworks. Mini

competitions over the summer around categories such as coffee and sandwiches have helped to drive even better value for money. The university also enlisted TUCO's help to embark on a fact-finding mission to find out how other members have approached delivered hospitality.

The team's success is now having a knock-on effect on other areas, such as demand for the university's revised event menus and full hospitality service.

Annabel says the launch of the delivered hospitality service has been a steep learning curve but one that's been liberating for the staff involved.

'Our success is down to the operations team who have delivered it. The new service has provided an opportunity to show the skills we have here and the team has embraced it. They want to showcase the fact that they're about an awful lot more than a prawn sandwich buffet and this has really empowered and engaged them to take ownership and be more creative.'

Key Advice

- **Communicate as much as possible with your customers to get them on board.**
- **Know your buildings so you really understand where you are delivering to before you kick off. You don't want to find out as you are delivering that there are four flights of stairs to negotiate!**

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.**

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