

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE: UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

Faced with the threat of outsourcing, Michaela Booth came to the University of Huddersfield in 2016 with a determination to keep the catering operations in-house. With support from a motivated team, the institution's food offering has gone from strength-to-strength.



"I must admit, I was shocked when I got here," Michaela Booth, Catering Operations Manager at University of Huddersfield states, looking back to her first week at the University in 2016 when she was brought in on a temporary basis to oversee the outsourcing of the catering operations. "The food offering was bland – all 10 outlets were offering the same food – and the team was demotivated."

As a champion of in-house catering, Michaela was keen to open the University's eyes to the benefit of keeping the operations in-house – not deterred by the fact that, at the time, she was only there temporarily, and that the University had already begun the formal tendering process. "I needed to prove to them it was worth keeping it all in-house", she comments.

Michaela was aware that Huddersfield was a TUCO member but not utilising the framework agreements to their full extent. The first step on the journey was to review the food offer at every outlet and show the true level of food that suppliers can offer. She organised a 'tasting event' where suppliers, colleagues, and students all gathered to taste quality food, prompt ideas, and showcase what the student experience should be about – great food, innovation and creativity. "The bosses were optimistic and supportive, and I was able to start implementing changes very quickly."

The starting point, Michaela observed, was increasing staff motivation; "working from the inside, out – they've got to be happy". Having faith in her team, opening the floor to new ideas, and making staff feel involved in every step of the decision making, all went a long way to changing the ethos and working culture within her team. "I am led by my team – I see how they feel, and what they think is working, and all their ideas are taken on board."

Success with this method is evident with the new vegetarian/vegan outlet which is solely run by one individual who has been



given significant freedom to operate– from menus, to design, to delivering the food. Michaela is proud of the success of this outlet and is quick to praise; "she's doing fantastic. Faith in the team is reaping rewards - you've got to believe in your staff for them to believe in you. I'm only as good as my team." And with the increased income, it's clear to see the difference staff motivation can make. The team have also seen a huge improvement in morale, lower sickness levels, less stress, and more staff.

By November 2016, Michaela had been offered a permanent contract. She knew that by getting the staff on board, improving the food quality and utilising the range of suppliers via their framework agreements, they could increase footfall, create customers, increase income and deliver the ultimate student experience. But it wasn't easy.

"There's always room for improvements – we've taken risks, tried things, and they've not always worked," Michaela notes, "but we've adapted. We are able to trial things, and if they don't work, we can change the concept quite quickly."

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- Michaela Booth
University of Huddersfield



Success has been apparent through multiple award wins including; TUCO Team of the Year 2017, TUCO Competitions, and Cost Sector Catering Awards 2018 for two categories; University Team of the Year and Innovation.

What was clear, was the need to bring diversity into the food offering, creating a high street feel whilst remaining cost-effective for the students, and staff, on-site; "we're an international global community with 129 nationalities – we have to be diverse within our menus; utilising new ideas and innovation." That also means not standing still when it comes to ever-changing industry trends, and legislation: "it's getting harder; the law is changing all the time and we have to keep up with it. It's key that we educate staff and keep training up-to-date because, competing with the high street, we need to be ahead of the game."

The University have been able to develop their teams by utilising the TUCO Academy – encouraging staff to attend courses, study tours and development days to help improve their skillset. Part of the increase in motivation has come from investing in the people that are key to contributing to the University's catering success.

They've also been able to take advantage of TUCO's networking opportunities, with Michaela commenting; "We're not on our own being part of TUCO. There's always help out there." The support of other member institutions as well as the TUCO Team, Michaela says, has been vital when faced with such a huge overhaul.

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- Michaela Booth
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So, what next? Huddersfood (the brand behind the campus' catering operations) will, in September, launch three new purpose-built outlets – bringing their total number of food outlets to 14 – all with a unique offering. Sustainability is also a key focus for them this year. One of their outlets use all glass and crockery, there are no disposables at all. Students and customers are encouraged to bring their own cup or purchase a keep-cup if they wish to take coffee off-site. Their salad packaging and drinking cups are all compostable, and they have their own herb garden which the chefs use regularly to contribute to the fresh food they're providing. What's more, coffee grounds from all sites are used in the greenhouses and flowerbeds.

Michaela concludes; "The University took a risk because they were adamant to outsource – but it's paid off. We're not stopping there, we're continuing to grow, and I'm excited to lead the team on the next step of the journey. I'm proud of what we've achieved at this University, but I couldn't have done it without TUCO's support."

About TUCO

TUCO is the leading professional membership body for in-house caterers operating in the public sector.

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 **£140m+** annual spend of **TUCO** members.**

If you would like to find out how TUCO can support your in-house catering department, call us: 0161 713 3420, email us: info@tuco.ac.uk or visit www.tuco.ac.uk/buy

**TOTAL SPEND THROUGH
TUCO FRAMEWORKS:**

£640,602.85

- ▶ Footfall increased from **1,500** to **5,000** on average per day
- ▶ Hospitality & Events has seen a **57%** increase

TUCO
The University Caterers Organisation