

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE: KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Sustainability is a key focus for King's College London; with a host of successful new initiatives that are really having a societal impact. Manish Shah, Associate Director at King's Food, explains why they're not resting on their laurels when it comes to introducing new and inventive ideas.



“One of our student feedback surveys showed that around 40% of our student base wanted vegan food, or were following a flexitarian diet”, says Manish Shah, Associate Director at King's Food. This is, partly, the reasoning behind the introduction of Roots at King's College London (KCL) – a completely plant-based café which is one of the many changes implemented over the recent months to showcase KCL's commitment to sustainability. Resulting in a year-on-year sales increase of 13%, the new café has had a successful impact on all fronts.

Launched originally as a 'pop-up' café, Roots is 100% plant-based – this means no dairy milk in the hot drinks to go alongside the vegan food offering, which has resulted in a few queries about where the milk is. “It took a while for people to realise when we say ‘plant-based’, it is actually all plant-based!”, explains Manish. “We wanted to come up with a lot more initiatives that said ‘we’re not going to make veganism different - we’re going to embrace it and make it part of our culture.’” Which is why the food at Roots says exactly what it is; “we didn’t want to call food items by their traditional names if that’s not what they are. So instead of ‘vegan chicken sausages’, we call it a seitan sausage. We feel this is embracing it, instead of giving it a comparison to meat or a meaty name - we’re trying to change the philosophy and the mindset.” It’s a concept which has resulted in a nomination for the café at the 2019 Green Gown Awards.

Although Roots is 100% plant-based, 100% of the time, other KCL outlets follow Meat-Free Mondays – no meat is delivered across all 17 outlets every Monday, giving customers a vegan and a vegetarian option only. “There have been no complaints about Meat-Free Mondays. Our location means we have the high street on our doorstep if people are really craving some meat; but we haven’t seen sales drop on a Monday”, says Manish.



“We don’t want to jump on a trend; trends will come and go. Plant-based food isn’t a trend, it’s a lifestyle and it’s not going anywhere.”

- Manish Shah,
King's College London



TUCO member means the team can attend the TUCO conferences where they can ask questions to suppliers about what the next big thing is. With universities, we’re not trend followers, we’re certainly trendsetters; we mould the students. We can’t change our menus as quickly as the high street and we can’t adapt as quickly so we try to learn from them, but we don’t want to copy them.”

Innovation is certainly at the forefront at KCL. Amongst other initiatives, a ‘Meet the Supplier & Meet the Team’ event was extremely well received. “We have over 31,000 students,” says Manish, “so we wanted to do more to create a personal touch. We wanted them to meet our chefs; we’re proud of the team and wanted to showcase them.” One of these chefs attending the event was their sushi chef, which means the university makes all their sushi in-house. “We had 400 people attend. We were able to tell our customers the stories behind their freshly prepared food and give them the opportunity to ask the team and suppliers any questions about the ingredients and the meals they’d be eating.”

Manish hails the support received from TUCO as one of the main sources of inspiration and innovation in KCL’s journey. As well as utilising TUCO’s reports and research, Manish and the team also find it useful to attend Conferences, build on skills through the Academy events, attend Study Tours for inspiration and utilise the TUCO team when they have questions. “We feel with TUCO that someone’s always on hand – the relationship is personal. And having a network of people at your disposal, it’s priceless”.

So, what next for KCL? Manish summarises: “What we do at King’s, we want to do it well. We don’t want to jump on a trend; trends will come and go. Plant-based food isn’t a trend, it’s a lifestyle and it’s not going anywhere. Our focus will continue to be around sustainability, supporting local businesses and giving our students the perfect dining experience.”

About TUCO

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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 **£146m+** annual spend of TUCO members.**

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King's College London Savings 2018/2019

Total spend through
TUCO frameworks

£3,050,152.05

Savings made from using
TUCO procurement

£371,133

TUCO
The University Caterers Organisation