

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

The University of Salford used contract catering to provide food & drink to their 25,000+ students and staff on campus, for over 10 years. In 2023, primarily driven by student feedback, a decision was made to bring all campus catering back in-house. Although the journey was not without challenges, the implementation was delivered in record time and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.



In October 2022, contracts with various outsourced caterers spanning over a decade were coming to an end. The team at University of Salford had to decide whether to renew, or to embark on a monumental change to bring catering back in-house.

“We needed to make a decision, and our students and staff were the ones we needed to listen to”, says Matthew Mealing, Associate Director of Campus Services.

They enlisted the support of an external consultant to gain feedback from students and staff, as to what they'd like to see from the University's catering going forward. They also explored the idea of different ways catering could be run on campus. The research found some improvements could be made on the current set up – mainly, better value-for-money, more sustainable practices, and higher utilisation of local suppliers.

“We also needed to consider the University's master plan, which we

“University leadership say [bringing catering in-house] is the best thing we've done in a long time,”

- Matthew Mealing,
Associate Director of Campus
Services.

term the Connectivity Plan. This centres around how we can join the dots between all the campus buildings, and what the development plans look like for the next 10 years. The idea to bring the catering back in-house, we felt, would be a good solution to aligning our buildings, whilst giving us the flexibility to control our own spaces and run them how we wanted to”, explains Matthew.

The business case went to, and was approved by, University council in January 2024, with a go-live date scheduled for August 2024 – just seven months away.

Within that time Matthew and his team worked tirelessly to launch a new in-house catering operation. The process involved TUPE-ing various staff, working through different contracts, implementing a new till system, introducing an e-Procurement system (they now use TUCO Online), a complete marketing re-brand, and a recruitment drive. Part of the recruitment drive, along with marketing and finance roles, included the hire of Andy Flowers – Head of Food & Drink, and Anthony Wright - Executive Chef. Following launch, Andy's role was to oversee the whole operation, working closely with Anthony who in turn would work closely with the customers to ensure the University was offering their students and staff exactly what they wanted.

“We wanted to bring the students into everything we do”, says Matthew, “we are looking at redesigning our outlets and as part of their course, interior design students will help with that. They also assist on the marketing side. We are now working with the students' union to ensure as many students as possible as hired to work within our retail and catering provision.”

TUCO was known to Matthew from previous roles, so he enlisted assistance in bringing the catering in-house.

Andy notes; “We met with the Head of Contracts at TUCO and we discussed the benefits of being a TUCO member. The TUCO team mapped our supplier information against appointed suppliers on TUCO agreements and put a timetable in place to carry out further competitions or, where possible, direct awards. We had a tight turnaround time so having that support was paramount.”



Also key to minimal disruption was a check of suppliers who were already on TUCO agreements, whereby the University could request to be put onto TUCO Terms. This would aid a smoother transition.

“There were some challenges, as to be expected,” comments Matthew, “but it was more about working through expectations from us as a University. Doing a project like this within seven months was a tall order, but it had to be done and everyone came together – suppliers especially worked with us to aid the transition.”

To combat the feedback received from customers about the lack of sustainable policies within the catering spaces, the team have developed a sustainable action plan. This includes removal of plastic bottles in the cafes, working with more local suppliers, re-purposing items from other outlets on campus, and a reduction of food waste.

So, what do the customers themselves think about the change? The University Leadership team have praised the time it took to deliver such a big project. It has justified our decision to develop a hybrid model, and has been an exciting change”, says Matthew, “we can tell it's been a success just by the increase in numbers through the doors. And with further retail space re-brands in the pipeline, we feel it's only going to get better. Bringing the food and drink in-house has given us more control over our spaces, the ability to offer our customers better value-for-money, and the choice of more local suppliers, therefore addressing any concerns that our customers had before the change. We feel it's been a big success. And there's still a long way to go.”

About TUCO

TUCO is the leading professional membership body for in-house caterers - supporting procurement & learning excellence and working to provide quality standards and advice to those working in public sector catering.

It provides a platform where members can **Share and celebrate achievements; **Learn** via a range of courses, training and study tours; **Grow** their business through latest market research, trends and analysis; and **Buy** via TUCO's UK compliant frameworks and wide range of suppliers – maximising value through the combined **£160m+** annual spend of TUCO members.**

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