



TUCO

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Showcasing Excellence

Harper Adams University

Harper Adams has used its 'farm to fork' ethos to boost catering sales, develop staff skills and establish a leading reputation for sustainability. But it's also the partnership between the catering and conference departments, their first-rate customer service and business planning that has helped the university achieve its strategic goal of 5% annual income growth

Not many universities have a farm in the middle of campus. Shropshire based Harper Adams is one such institution, rearing animals and growing crops 400 metres from its kitchens. The university's 'farm to fork' ethos is not only crucial to students' studies, but, catering manager David Nuttall believes, also underpins the commercial success of the university's in-house catering operation.

Yet this hasn't always been the case. In 2006 David joined Harper Adams (which specialises in farming and agricultural studies). Back then none of the chefs were using campus farm produce.

"It was a logistical problem," David explains. "Getting the animals to slaughter, getting the farmer to breed the animals with the most meat. We had dairy cows but they weren't right for eating."

David saw that using produce from the university's farm made sense on a number of levels. His staff now cook with eggs, potatoes, chillies and herbs produced on-site. Cheese, bread and milk is sourced within 20 miles. Other food is purchased, locally where possible, by catering consortium TUCO.

These measures significantly reduced the university's produce costs. By rearing livestock and butchering in-house, the catering team saves just under £600 per cow, £150 per pig and £50 per lamb. Chefs get through one cow, six lambs and four pigs a week so savings are considerable.

This holistic approach has also boosted

skills. Previously, the university's chefs would cook with vacuum packed meat. Now they are given large portions of an animal which they joint themselves.

"I thought the chefs would hate me!" laughs David, "but they've bought into the whole ethos. I overhear the butcher telling the farm manager that a certain pig was too fatty and he needs a different type for a hog roast. The knowledge and co-operation between our in-house food team and other parts of the university is brilliant. I can't see how that would ever happen with a contract caterer. The flexibility wouldn't be there. They just wouldn't have the passion."

This passion also drives the catering team's attitude to sustainability, a priority for its customers – the university's 4,000 students – who are all highly aware of the food chain.

"We work with the concept of food metres, not food miles," says David. "Our aim is to show students and staff that we can produce dishes with very little carbon footprint."

Menus change weekly depending on the season and availability of produce. "Even on a commercial scale, local sourcing is crucial to make sure that our environmental impact is minimal, our food is top quality and we support the local economy," David comments.

Leftover food is weighed and the results printed on menus to raise awareness of wastage. Chip oil is transformed into biodiesel to power university tractors and

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waste food is sent to an anaerobic digester. These measures have helped Harper Adams to achieve second place – out of 126 universities – in the University 2020 carbon reduction targets league table compiled by sustainability consultancy Brite Green and published in April 2015.

The university's approach to minimising waste continues around food preparation. Chefs make sure that every bit of each animal is used. Pigs' trotters are given to veterinary nurses for suturing practice. Pigs' ears become treats for dogs working with veterinary physiotherapy students. This saves other university departments money and cuts food waste.

There is also a clear plan when it comes to dividing up meat for the kitchens. Superior cuts such as sirloin and fillet steaks are served to conference guests. "We use the tasty but less expensive meat for students. This means we can feed each student for £3.70 per meal and it helps with our business model," David explains.

This business model covers the provision of three meals a day, five days a week in term time for students from six



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Procurement Costs and Savings – 13/14

Total expenditure via TUCO frameworks	£476,704.86
Cash Savings	£39,147.29
Process Savings	£24,000.00
Manufacturer Rebates to University	£2,713.58
TUCO Annual Subscription	(£ 100.00)
TOTAL NET SAVINGS	£65,760.87

Short Courses and Conferences

Conference guests numbers for 2008–2013

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of conferences	106	123	177	213	255	221
Number of delegates	6268	5965	7831	13163	13153	13508

of the university's halls of residence in the Queen Mother hall, which seats 250.

Other on-site catering services include Pam's Pantry, which is open during morning lectures and sells snacks and hot drinks. At Graze Cafe, the university's newest eatery, English breakfasts are popular. The modern Kaldi Coffee Shop, in the library, offers home-baked cakes and speciality teas and coffees.

"We don't have retail franchises because of our farm to fork ethos," David comments. "A unique selling point is that much of our food comes directly from our farm so we shout about that, not about other brands. However, we do have a self-service Costa Express coffee bar. Students have really bought into it. They don't quibble about paying £2.50 for a Costa coffee so when we charge much less in our own cafes they see it as good value for money."

Other outlets include the campus shop – Feed Store – which stocks supplies for self-catering students and Fairtrade goods. Students and staff can also buy joints of meat from the campus farm to take home, providing another income source and demonstrating the popularity of the university's own food.

Across all outlets and revenue streams, David and his team conduct a detailed analysis of sales trends and they review competitor activity regularly. They also operate a highly responsive customer service policy. These factors have contributed to a significant increase in catering income from £800,000 in 2009/10

to £1,000,000 in 2013/14. In 2013/14 catering generated a surplus of £92,000 which was reinvested in developing new food outlets and updating essential catering equipment. In 2014/15 this surplus is on course to exceed £130,000.

Every month, the catering department produces a business activity report for each outlet, identifying sales trends. Reports are displayed in staff areas to highlight successes and areas for improvement and to request staff feedback.

Graze Cafe opened in 2011 with combined sales (cash, ID card, chip & PIN) of £165,058 for the first 12 months. Two years on, income rose by 30% to £215,364. Going forward, the aim is to increase sales annually by 10%.

By breaking down cash, ID card and chip & PIN sales for each outlet, the catering department is able to identify areas of future focus. For example, in 2012/13 Graze Cafe made over £10,000 in cash sales every month for nine months of the year. But this same cash sales figure was only achieved during five months of 2013/14, something David has tasked staff with increasing.

Competitor analysis has also helped to drive sales. Assessment of the food prices, portion sizes, promotions and menus of other universities and colleges, hotels, conference centres, local pubs, restaurants and take-aways has enabled Harper Adams' own catering business to remain competitive. The department aims to be cheaper or on par with rival offers to ensure value and maximise sales. A few

years ago a benchmarking survey by the University of Surrey reported that Harper Adams' food prices are amongst the cheapest offered by UK universities.

The catering team's pricing policies are flexible but David ensures they generate enough of a financial return to meet current costs, to cover 'wear and tear' and to enable investment that meets future market demands.

Strong student satisfaction is another key business objective. "Students give us initial feedback in the first four weeks of term and we use this to tweak our provision at the beginning of the academic year," comments David.

Surveys are carried out about students' eating habits and preferences throughout the year. Students are encouraged to share feedback on the catering department's Facebook page and comment boxes are located in campus outlets.

"Our policy is to respond to comments within 24 hours. A list of remarks and responses are kept on file, with actions for correction. Replies are also posted back to customers on cafe noticeboards," says David.

Market intelligence is also supplied by national catering consortium TUCO and the National Student Survey, with regional and national data about the student experience informing Harper Adams' catering offer.

Market research and customer feedback has directly increased the range of sandwiches and vegetables served, as well as extending outlet opening times and widening the number of ways students can pay, speeding up transaction times.

This focus on customer service has paid off with Harper Adams being ranked 13th out of 123 UK universities for student satisfaction by the Times Good University

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Guide 2015. In 2014 it won Venuemasters' Best Initiative to Improve Customer Service Award.

These are just some of the many accolades that the food operation has recently won. In 2011 Harper Adams was crowned Best Public Caterer in the BBC Food and Farming Awards. In 2012 it won both a Foodservice Catey Award for Sustainable Business and a

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Foodservice Footprint Award. In 2014 the university became one of only nine UK higher education institutions to receive the prestigious Hospitality Assured accreditation.

The latest successes came in June when Harper Adams was crowned winner of the Foodservice Footprint Award for Sustainability in Education for 2015 and also won the “Highest Scoring Newcomer” Hospitality Assured Award.

David believes that his department's relationship with catering consortium TUCO has played a big part in this success, particularly in generating savings that can be used to develop other parts of the catering service.

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of gives us a good balance. They are our security. We know we get great value for money with them.”

TUCO achieves low prices by using its purchasing power. The consortium procures goods and services for 340 universities and colleges, 28 local authorities and four NHS trusts, meaning it can drive down costs and maximise quality. Last year Harper Adams saved nearly £66,000 through TUCO frameworks.

David himself is a non-executive director of TUCO and regional chair for the north-west. These roles see him sharing knowledge and best practice with other university catering departments. His chefs have done the same at TUCO organised catering competitions. “They get a lot out of it,” David explains. “We've taken part in TUCO training on allergens and new labelling and the chefs talk to their peers. It's a chance to realise that we all have the same issues!”

Staffing is one of these shared issues and an area that David Nuttall has completely overhauled to ensure he has direct control. “When I first joined, people would come back from sick leave and they would be met with ‘great, you're back, now crack on!’”

“Now it's much more structured. I introduced ‘return to work’ interviews and we also provide weekly charts showing figures on catering sickness absence and what it costs the university. This is so staff understand the massive financial impact.”

David explains that these actions have improved the food service's sickness record dramatically and other departments within the university have

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

The in-house catering team:

- » Serves 2,500 meals a day
- » Sells 220 cups of coffee a day
- » Uses 4 cows, 24 lambs and 16 pigs from the university's farm every month
- » Hand-makes over 1,500lbs of sausages every four weeks

On campus there are:

- » 4,000 students (of which 2,200 are undergraduates)
- » 560 academic and support staff
- » 68 catering staff (35 contracted, 33 casual)
- » 6 conference staff

now adopted similar processes.

One of these departments is the short course and conference office (SCCO). Although SCCO is run separately from catering, David's team has formed a close partnership with its conferencing counterpart, providing food for regional and national events which range from residential bible schools to weddings and royal visits.

An impressive 80% of Harper Adams' conferences and short courses are repeat bookings and the likes and dislikes of delegates and organisers are kept on file. Data shows that this high level of return business is down to the university's rural location, top standards of food



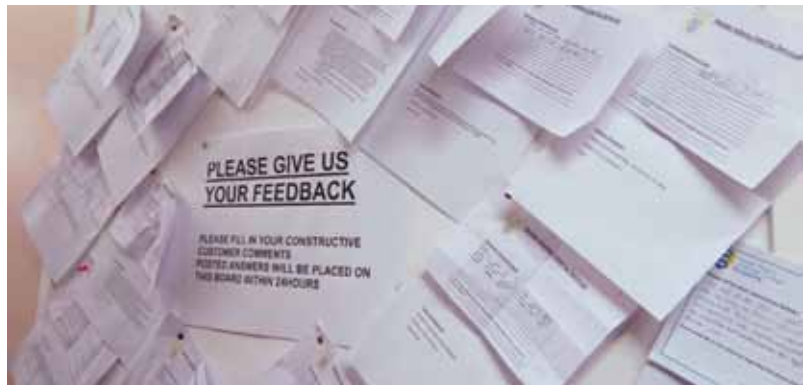
and service, the value for money that clientele receive and the suitability of facilities.

It's the university's dining facilities that particularly dictate these types of bookings. Capacity for sit down meals is 250 and David's team often provide two or three days of informal catering – counter service, BBQs or a hog roast – culminating in a more formal fine dining meal.

Conference income for 2013/14 came in at £1,800,000, an increase of 10% from 2012/13. To increase sales further, the SCCO team have been looking at events that will boost all-year-round occupancy such as farm tours, coach groups and marketing the university's facilities to students' parents, 50% of whom work for companies that may need hospitality services.

This sense of partnership working within the Harper Adams' 'community' – where students and staff endorse the

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university to friends and family – means David couldn't imagine a contract caterer running things.

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David believes this internal co-operation, in which the in-house catering operation plays a key role, contributed to Harper Adams being shortlisted for

the Times Higher Education's University of the Year award in 2013. In 2015 the university won second place for the title of University of the Year, beating off 111 other institutions in the What Uni Student Choice Awards.

“These are massive achievements for such a small campus. We only became a university in 2012. I feel very proud that we are getting this type of recognition already.”



If you would like to find out how **TUCO** can support your in-house catering service, contact us on **0161 713 3420**, email **info@tucos.org** or visit **www.tucos.org**



TUCO

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TUCO is the leading professional membership body for in-house caterers operating in the higher and further education sector. A total of 340 universities and colleges use our services every year. We also support in-house catering teams in the wider public sector, including 28 local authorities and 4 NHS Trusts.

We are committed to advancing the learning and development of catering and hospitality teams, and we work to boost quality standards and provide essential market advice and information to those working in the sector.

No longer just a purchasing consortium, TUCO has responded to the changing needs of its members and now provides like-minded individuals with a place to go to share their values.

From running conferences, competitions, study tours and courses, to researching and providing the tools needed to help institutions get better at what they do, TUCO has grown into a bespoke membership organisation.

Membership is open to all in-house catering operations in the higher and further education sector.

If you are not a further or higher education institution, then it is still possible for you to join TUCO. Please email info@tuco.org for more details.

Our members receive support and guidance from TUCO in four key areas:

SHARE

TUCO provides a platform where members can combine ideas and achievements to collectively raise the profile of university and college catering in the UK. We also help members to network with other professionals and industry experts, sharing best practice and culinary trends.



LEARN

We offer a wide range of subsidised courses, training, study tours and professional advice, to maximise each member's potential.



"In four years, I have seen TUCO grow from a purchasing consortium into a true vehicle for the benefit of university caterers."

– **Jeremy Mabbutt**, *Head of Hospitality Services at Aberystwyth University*

GROW

We help our members to keep up-to-date with the latest market research, industry trends and consumer preferences and gain insight into studies on topics affecting the foodservice market.



BUY

TUCO has significant buying power, purchasing £100m of goods and services every year for 340 universities and colleges as well as 28 local authorities and 4 NHS Trusts. Members can choose from 17 EU compliant catering frameworks and 182 suppliers.



For more details of how to join **TUCO** call **0161 713 3420** or email **info@tuco.org**