

# SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER

The University of Chester's hospitality and residential services team is taking a leading role in the sustainability agenda with an approach that's reducing waste, enhancing the student experience and saving money.



**In its Sustainability Strategy 2020, the University of Chester declares that its goal is to embed sustainability throughout its campuses, community, cultures and curriculum.**

Pivotal to that aim is the work of the hospitality and residential services team, which takes in all catering staff along with conferencing, residential living and

domestic services. It was created through a recent reorganisation that has enabled the university to take a consistent and comprehensive approach to sustainability – in many cases building on successful practices pioneered by its award-winning catering department.

Led by former director of catering Ian White, the team's work is at the very

heart of student life and as such means it can have a major impact on some of the environmental challenges facing the university.

A prime example is the Eco Box. The university was spending around £3,000 a year on 78,000 polystyrene food tubs, which created a huge amount of non-recyclable waste and a drain on resources to clear up litter across the institution's sites. But their use also encouraged students to take food away and eat alone and staff to indulge in the 'desk-lunch' culture.

By introducing the sturdy, reusable and recyclable plastic Eco Box, the team has helped customers to take control of their environmental impact – reducing waste and litter in the process – and encouraged more people to eat together at catering outlets.



## SPEND THROUGH TUCO FRAMEWORKS

Total expenditure  
**£1,041,526**

Cash savings  
**£101,637**

Process savings  
**£6,000**

TUCO annual subscription  
**£100**

Total net savings  
**£107,537**

It's been so successful that an Eco Cup has also been introduced. The box and cup both cost £5 and students can bring them back for staff to wash up in exchange for a clean box, cup or key fob (which can be used to obtain a box or cup later). As an incentive, those who buy nine meals in the Eco Box get the 10th for free.

The Eco Box won the Green Gown Award for food and drink, a category sponsored by TUCO. It was also shortlisted for the environmental industry award at the Educate North and UK Leadership Awards where Ian was highly commended in the UK leadership category. The university is sharing the learning with other institutions throughout TUCO's network.

Ian believes the initiative's success is down to three key factors: changing attitudes via a comprehensive communications campaign about the Eco Box; bringing students on board to get their feedback; and ensuring the project is sustainable in the long term by making it cost-neutral and getting catering staff to champion the Eco Box.

Students from the geography and international development department were brought in to assess the Eco Box and the department's wider environmental practices. It's clearly getting the message across: just 10% of dining students were aware before hospitality food waste

campaigns, rising to 86% afterwards.

'The Eco box system went very well once we got the understanding among customers,' says Ian. 'It means we handle all the washing up and can keep monitoring the state of the cups and boxes as we go along and stop the use of disposables.'

The university's latest innovation – a meat-free bar in one of its dining rooms – is also proving to be a big hit. It was opened partly in response to growing demand for more vegetarian and vegan options but also as a way to spread the sustainability message by encouraging students to have meat-free days.

The bar has been accredited by the Vegetarian Society and since opening sales have risen by 30% compared with the previous operation with overall take up of vegetarian options also up by 30%.

The university is also set to become only the second higher education institution in the UK to achieve CreatureKind status for practices that reduce impact on animal welfare.

Members of Ian's team have won a multitude of TUCO awards in recent years and he has also made extensive use of framework agreements to further the university's sustainability aims.

The reorganisation that brought all aspects of hospitality, residential living and domestic services together has

enabled him to mainstream approaches from catering. For example, all cleaning products have been switched to environmentally sustainable ones using Bidvest.

Ian says this consistent approach, combined with awards and accreditation, are essential to his team's credibility and a big selling point for students.

'Today, you need everything to be backed up and students are looking for that verification. I'm a firm believer that if we have got the awards and accreditation it proves we have a credible team to uphold what we are doing. Whenever we are doing anything now we go for the accreditation.'

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**18,000** students

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**2,000** staff

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**250** hospitality & residential services staff (including 100 in catering)

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**£3.5m** catering and conference turnover

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**15** catering outlets

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**The University of Chester has introduced Bake Off days once a month where bread and cakes made in house are sold in a farmers' market-style setting on campus. The move came after the hospitality and residential services team recruited an artisan baker who, with the help of two confectioners, bakes high quality fare for students, staff and local residents. It's proved so popular that smaller scale events are now held at the university's satellite campuses.**

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## 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.

**TUCO**  
The University Caterers Organisation

**Find out more about TUCO**

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