

Keen to give its catering outlets a competitive edge, Sheffield Hallam University has embarked on a strategy that's designed to differentiate its offer. The result is three new brands which are boosting sales, raising standards and engaging students



The University Caterers Organisation

Showcasing excellence

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY



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31,000 students

4,300 staff

90 catering staff

£3.2m catering
turnover

On the face of it, the Collegiate Campus at Sheffield Hallam University is ideally located to capitalise on a captive market and ensure its students eat and drink at the institution's outlets. This sprawling collection of university buildings is in a leafy suburb more than a mile from the city centre.

However, it's just a stone's throw from bustling Ecclesall Road – one of Sheffield's prime destinations for eating out and home to dozens of independent eateries and well-known chains.

Acutely aware of this growing competition, the catering team chose to test out a new brand in one of its outlets at Collegiate. With the Heart of the Campus building having just undergone a £35m refurbishment it was the

ideal time to launch The Granary – a café focusing on freshly prepared wholesome, hearty food.

Situated in an atrium space with room for 160 customers, the combination of a strong identity and a varied menu using local producers and suppliers has been a big hit. It has just finished its second full year of trading and sales are up by over 40% since the opening.

Far from being a one-off, The Granary marked the start of a new strategy at Sheffield Hallam that continues to evolve.

The university's 16 outlets were previously all under one generic brand, Chef Hallam. Although popular, the products were 'fairly homogenous and predictable', says Jon



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.

Find out more about TUCO

0161 713 3420 info@tuc.org www.tuc.org



Broadhurst, head of catering.

'There are a lot of competitors out there – it's a very competitive environment. For example, there are over 100 different options close to the Collegiate Campus. We decided to develop three new brands in order to change the reason for purchase from convenience to preference based on quality and value for money.'

Each of the brands – The Granary, The Deli and Il Barista – has its own mission statement and offer that has been developed using feedback from focus groups, conducted by an independent market research company, and via feedback submitted to kiosks located across the university.

For example, they each sell different brands of coffee to give a sense of distinctiveness. The Granary uses Café Cereza, a brand developed by Sheffield-based ethical firm Caféology. 'It kicked off a trend of having a different coffee brand in each outlet to give a separate identity. It's also partly down to a commitment to using local suppliers,' Jon explains.

Like all of his department's purchasing, products for The Granary are bought through TUCO's frameworks.

The Granary has already secured a two-star Food Made Good rating from the Sustainable Restaurant Association in recognition of its social, economic and environmental contribution. The brand continues to be developed and further community engagement is planned to add some fine-tuning and further

outlets are in the pipeline.

But the subject of the biggest rollout will be a second brand, The Deli. It's currently open at Charles Street, one of the university's city centre bases, and new home to the Sheffield Institute of Education, and a further half a dozen are expected to be launched over the next year.

Jon describes it as a 'grab and go' offer with fresh and nutritious food centred on contemporary hot dishes and interesting, nutritious sandwiches.

'The Deli has been an interesting journey because it's very much for students, by students,' he explains. That included employing undergraduate students studying nutrition to help develop the menu and provide a full nutritional analysis.

The intention is for outlets in The Deli brand to be staffed by a mix of placement students and student casuals and supervised by graduate interns.

'It gives them an opportunity to learn something about running a business.'

The third and most recent brand to be launched is Il Barista. Jon says its mantra is all about 'great coffee, a unique place to meet, made-to-order handmade sandwiches and artisan cakes'. The first opened up in The Institute of Arts new home in one of the city's landmark buildings – a former central post office which had been derelict for several years.

At its heart is an exhibition space, so Il Barista has an opportunity to attract a wider range of customers.

The launch of the three brands is being complemented by a concerted effort by the catering team to market their increasingly varied offer to students. Jon worked with TUCO on a nationwide benchmarking exercise and Sheffield Hallam's outlets are now displaying price comparisons to highlight the value for money they offer.

But price is just one part of the picture, he says.

'Although we work to keep our prices low, we want to compete on quality. Young people are becoming more interested in quality, where food comes from and the health benefits. That's where our new brands fit in. We're not the cheapest but we are looking to offer excellent value for money.'

Spend through TUCO frameworks

Total expenditure – **£929,986**

Cash savings – **£93,234.57**

Process savings – **£6,000**

TUCO annual subscription – **£100**

Total net savings – **£99,134.57**