

The University Caterers Organisation (TUCO) commissioned three independent studies, gathering insights from around the World. The resulting findings look at current student eating habits alongside future predictions from a cross-section of over 3,000 students, covering three different continents.

Chair of the Research Committee, Phil Rees-Jones, commented: "With representation from over 100 universities in the UK, we pride ourselves on being pioneers within the Higher Education catering sector. This study will, for the first time ever, collate the eating habits of students across the World. The insights gathered will shed true light on modern-day student' eating habits and offer all our members a new level of intelligence which will help drive positive business growth planning."

REPORT ONE: USA STUDENT FOOD TRENDS (from students' perspective)...

Does it follow that "what starts in the USA - comes to the UK?" This first report looks at how the eating habits of UK students compare to their US counterparts – revealing the different eating cultures across the pond.

Key findings in brief:

- The UK is ahead on healthy eating - 59% of UK students say they eat what they consider to be a healthy diet but only 35% of US students say campus does a good job of offering healthy foods.
- 37% of US students regularly use mobile technology to decide what to eat, make orders and pay for their food on campus.
- 58% of American students eat on campus regularly, with US students making particular use of vending machines and facilities during the evening, suggesting an inclination towards convenience foods and late night eating habits.
- The UK is following in the footsteps of the US, with Mexican food (which is already a mainstream cuisine in the US) rapidly growing on UK campus menus.
- Both UK and US students cite a low price point as the most important factor when purchasing food.
- Students see eating occasions as less defined than traditional three meals a day with meals extending to five smaller meals per day, suggesting an opportunity for caterers to drive new revenue through snacking.

REPORT TWO: CATERING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

With rapidly rising numbers of overseas students - a reported 435,500[1] in 2013/2014 – and with over 50% of overseas students preferring to eat on campus, this report looks at how this has changed the way universities approach their catering facilities, to accommodate world fusion food offering and balance traditional needs against contemporary modern eating trends.

Key findings in brief:

- 67% of international students like to try different dishes that they may not have tasted before.
- The top three cuisines international students would like to see more of on university menus were Chinese (42%), Italian (31%), and Japanese (30%).
- Of all dietary requirements the most common was Halal food, with 14% of all respondents flagging this.
- Only 5% of students surveyed want to eat British food. 84% want to eat a 'mix of foods from home and elsewhere'.
- Alcohol doesn't feature largely in their diet with only 3% drinking 'on most days'. 26% answered 'never' and 29% answered 'hardly ever'.

REPORT THREE: GLOBAL FOOD TRENDS

To complete the full outlook on trends and perceptions, the Food People undertook a major analysis of food trends across the world, exploring the current and emerging states in 36 cities across five global regions and examining the menus of 2,305 outlets to gain a complete picture of the future of food.

Key findings in brief:

- 12 current macro food trends, over-arching casual, fine, on-the-go and leisure feeding.
- 84 micro trends, which underlie these.
- Students have come to expect that they can customise their meals.
- At the same, there is a huge rise in single speciality outlets.

- Food and eating is no longer just about consumption but experience and students also look to be immersed and stimulated when dining out.
- Rules no longer apply – anything goes and consumers generally are looking for totally unique dining.

TUCO Chair, Julie Barker, also commented: “The results from the reports offer a full and in-depth look into the true eating habits of students – and equally areas where university caterers can look to the future and amend their offering to meet the ever-changing demands of university students and remain competitive against off-campus outlets.

“What we have seen is that there are areas of competitive advantage that university caterers can capitalise on such as providing value meal plans that can help students control spending; a unique situation that can’t be offered by the High Street.

“We have also found that, with an increasing number of international students, university caterers need to ensure the tastes and habits of those from overseas are catered for, as they offer a growing, potential revenue stream which will help to boost the bottom line.”

If you would like to receive a copy of the research contact the TUCO Head Office.