

# REALISING YOUR RIGHT

As the first Right to Food university, the University of Kent is committed to promoting food justice, tackling food poverty, and transforming its food system

**Spanning two campuses - Canterbury and Medway - the University of Kent has approximately 18,000 students. It ranks in the UK Top 50 of the Complete University Guide, featuring in the top 10 places to study for both its Forensic Science and Creative Writing courses.**

With that many mouths to feed across two locations there are multiple catering stakeholders, but the university itself operates seven foodservice outlets on the Canterbury campus, plus hospitality, banqueting and an online food delivery service.

One of the most popular outlets is Rutherford Dining Hall, which has a traditional servery offer focused around value for money and a popular wok bar accounts for 27% of food and beverage sales.

*“Rutherford serves around 800 meals per day to staff and students”*

Broadly speaking Rutherford serves around 800 meals per day to staff and students, but the outlet also serves a range of hot meals for £3 to help combat the cost-of-living crisis. Since September, it has served 40,400 £3 meals and 79,000 since the offer began.

The Gulbenkian Arts Centre Café also has an extremely popular brunch offer, accounting for 15% of sales, including healthy and locally sourced options as well as a traditional cooked breakfast.

“All of our services are well used, including home-made pizzas, fast food and a range of home-made grab-and-go salads, pasta pots

and soups,” says Tim Burrows, operations manager for University of Kent Hospitality.

“Distribution is fairly even across all menus, but the most popular three items overall are stir fry with chicken from the wok bar, Katsu Chicken Curry, and traditional English breakfast. In terms of grab and go specifically, we run a competitive meal deal to help combat the cost-of-living crisis: a sandwich, drink and piece of fruit or bag of crisps for £3.”

## WHAT'S NEW?

The focus in the last year has been to diversify the food offer to better meet the university demographics and to be more flexible on location. With that in mind, the team has developed a number of microbrands, representing authentic Caribbean, Greek, Indian and plant-based cuisine. The food is centrally prepared and either retailed through its units or finished and served from branded pop-ups all over campus, such as during welcome week, when the team creates a food village on the Registry Lawn.

## PERSONALISATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

At the University of Kent, the food service ethos is personalisation, sustainability, and inclusivity. “We strive to provide a cost-effective catering service that not only meets the needs and expectations of our university and local community but also surpasses them, by continuously exploring new culinary trends, sustainability practices, and fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment where students, staff and local community can gather, connect and create memorable occasions,” says Tim.

In recent years both students and staff have become a lot more vocal over sustainable issues, especially around plant-based food and







carbon footprint. "The challenge is to work with the university community and make changes which are both genuinely impactful and financially sustainable," says Tim. "We now work harder at shouting about sustainable practices and raising awareness around not only what we are doing, but challenging our current suppliers and prospective suppliers."

"We have a challenging yet achievable sustainability programme which links with other university initiatives around the community garden and the Right to Food."

### NAVIGATING RISING COSTS

In the last 18 months, the team has worked hard to review every single process in catering: purchasing processes have been simplified, production has been rationalised, replication of activities has been removed, menus have been simplified, specifications have been re-worked, food waste has been combatted. "Through all of this work, we have managed to actually reduce our menu prices across the board, which in turn has driven sales and volume," Tim says. "Through rationalising our purchasing, we are now able to share the challenge of rising food costs and sustainability with our supply partners. We are also working with local suppliers to educate about our requirements and how to work with a university, either through direct supply or through our existing partners."


### RIGHT TO FOOD

Kent has partnered with The Food Foundation to become the first Right to Food University, committing to promote food justice, tackle food poverty and transform our food system so that it operates to advance human health and an environmentally sustainable society.

"Our Canterbury and Medway campuses will be places where the right to food is realised in practice - in student kitchens, canteens, the university estate, the courses on offer and through research collaborations," says Tim.

At the heart of this initiative is protecting students and staff from food insecurity. "All of us have the right to healthy and affordable food and being able to eat regular, fresh and nutritious meals each day is fundamental to our health and wellbeing," Tim adds. "We will ensure that the food served on our campus supports health, wellbeing and environmental sustainability."

### TUCO'S ROLE

As discussions are had with the university community and prospective local suppliers around the issues of rising food costs and increased requirements for local and sustainable products, the team finds themselves explaining how they need to procure food and their relationship with TUCO. "Finding best value and working with our existing supply chain is key to providing a value-for-money service," says Tim. "Interaction with other TUCO members and hearing that we are all facing similar challenges provides not only a sense of solidarity, but also sharing of knowledge, ideas and solutions." 

# HOSPITALITY HERO

We caught up with Annie Borelli, assistant manager of Darwin College Catering at the University of Kent and winner of TUCO's 2023 Rising Star Award, to find out more about her career journey, surprise nomination, and how her role at the university has evolved since winning



**“Ask my family – I’ve always been a foodie!” laughs an animated Annie. From chatting with her it’s clear she’s passionate about not only food but her role at the university.**

Annie was nominated for TUCO's Rising Star Award by her manager Chris Terry, with help from other members of the team, including operations manager for University of Kent Hospitality Tim Burrows. “A lot of others had a hand in my nomination, people I'd met throughout my journey here, and it was really amazing to hear that they'd all had an input in the nomination,” says a humbled Annie. “The best part of the process was getting to hear the things they added to the nomination. It was really touching. And it was an amazing experience being at the awards dinner and receiving the award; the reception I got from my team going back was really rewarding for me.”

The accolade is made all the more impressive given that Annie's still only been with the team just shy of three years. Over that time, she's worked in different capacities: starting with part-time work as a casual member of

staff in the university's bars, then becoming supervisor before being promoted to assistant manager of Darwin College.

“I'd only made the step up to my management role less than six months before the nomination, so it's been a lot of changes over such a short period of time!” she says. “I worked in hospitality and catering throughout my university career and really enjoy food, service and events especially – I've always enjoyed what I do, and like having a job different to my other interests as it gives me more variety to what I do.”

Talking to Annie it comes across that keeping things varied and exciting is an important factor for her, and one that fits perfectly with her role, since Annie not only oversees event catering for Darwin College, but her team also ships events out to “pretty much every building and site on campus”, as well as centrally producing a lot of the food that goes out in other units on campus.

“We centrally produce a range of grab-and-go style lunch options, as well as central productions for our range of Kerala curries – which is overseen by our chefs from different

parts of India – and they produce that as part of my team and we ship that around to different parts of the campus,” she says. “It's a very different role – I have a lot of variety in my life!”

Not one to stagnate, her daily role has grown a lot in the time since receiving the TUCO Rising Star Award last summer. “The following term we changed a lot of how we were running our catering operations, so my role grew to overseeing central production as well as event catering – and seeing how those two things can rationalise and run alongside one another,” she explains.

“Student needs and interests are changing – the landscape isn't the same as it was before Covid-19, and I think that some of that has bounced back, but other things have changed longer-term. It's something that university catering is looking at in general as a challenge, but for us it's quite unique that we're looking to streamline our offering between doing large events but also producing food throughout the campus.”

Taking their Kerala curry as an example, that's a menu produced for events specifically, but it's also on menus throughout campus. “It's seeing how those things can work together and be available to both the students and people who are booking externally,” Annie explains. So, the big question is, what's next for our rising star? In the short term, she's looking towards Kent's summer offering. “During these months, we host lots of external conferences and clients,” says Annie. “It's a busy period, but with enough planning and preparation, it is also one of the most exciting seasons of the year.”

In the longer term, her goal is to see how the team can build upon the work they've done this year: “I think the most important thing will be to remain open to change so that we can adapt to the needs of the students and clients we serve.

“I envisage the future of university catering to be student-centred and rooted in the community. Our goal is to create environments where students, faculty, and members of the community feel happy. The best way to achieve this is to provide excellent services that bring people together to learn, network, and build relationships.” 