Contract Catering

Quality, professionalism & adaptability
The BSA - Business Services Association - is a policy and research organisation. It brings together all those who are interested in delivering efficient, flexible and cost-effective service and infrastructure projects across the private and public sectors.

The BSA Contract Catering and Hospitality Committee comprises those members of the BSA who are directly involved in providing catering services.

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As consumers, we eat a significant amount of meals away from home. Meals consumed out of home represented almost half (43.6%) of total consumer expenditure on food and drink in 2014. And we are much more aware of the link between what we eat and our health and wellbeing, energy levels and productivity throughout the day. As suppliers of meals across a range of settings, contract catering services are vitally important in daily life.

In every school, university, hospital, prison and military base, more thought is now given to the food served, dining facilities and related services in these environments, and the impact these have on service users.

In the business world too, there is a growing interest in contract catering services. Not only does the food on offer to employees need to meet their preferences as consumers, it can also generate revenue for organisations and impact on workplace culture and productivity.
Industry statistics

The public sector spends £2.4bn annually procuring food and catering services across:

- School dinners
- Further and higher education
- Ministry of Defence
- Government Department Offices
- Prisons
- NHS hospitals and care homes

£5.7bn £3.1bn 163,000 2,072

total annual turnover of food services businesses
gross value added to the UK economy
people employed in contract catering
food service enterprises in the UK

Sources:
A Plan for Public Procurement, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, July 2014
Behind the scenes

The food service offer

As consumers, we only see the customer-facing catering offer - the canteen or retail outlet through which meals are served. What we do not see is the amount of work and expertise that goes into creating nutritious, delicious meals that meet the requirements of both consumers and the contracting body.

Understanding clients’ needs is vital to delivering successful catering contracts. This will differ from sector to sector, with schools having different requirements to hospitals and military personnel having different needs to prisoners. Clients’ objectives also shape the food service offer. Some clients are committed to sustainability targets and will want their contract caterer to consider their carbon footprint. Others may have close ties to their local community and may ask their caterer to source ingredients from local producers.

As well as supporting clients to meet their objectives, contract catering providers also need to ensure they meet the expectations of consumer groups. This includes offering meals that meet a variety of nutritional and religious requirements, offering healthy options and meal deals where appropriate and keeping up with the latest food trends.

The client’s requirements shape the type of catering service delivered. This could be a retail outlet, canteen-style facility, set menu provision or food delivered directly to consumers. The setting can also raise challenges for caterers to overcome, such as logistical challenges in large hospitals or the seasonal nature of demand for services at sporting events.
Case study: OCS Group

OCS provide catering across several sectors, including Business and Industry, Healthcare, Education, Government Services and Leisure.

Although each sector has its own specific needs there are many common themes in the way a catering contract is tendered, including sustainability, the health of users, provenance of products, customer service and cost. The varying factor is which of these the client regards as most important when awarding the contract, and perhaps even more significantly, what their customers consider to be most important when using the service, and how the service develops across the term of the contract in line with changing food trends.

To ensure that we continually offer change and innovation for our clients, OCS has just launched a new pop up food concept. Pop ups are temporary food options in a restaurant that offer a different cuisine to the main restaurant, or a new themed service area for a short period of time.

These are designed to ensure product provenance and authentic recipes that are nutritionally analysed so that we can provide essential nutritional information to pass on to customers. Each offering comes with training notes on providing an excellent customer experience. This approach has demonstrated increased cash sales and customer satisfaction when delivered across a range of sectors. It provides innovation for the client by creating an exciting new offer in their restaurants without the need to invest capital in the building.

In providing catering services across a variety of sectors, our food and business development team work hard to understand the evolving nature of food and customers, ensuring that the client and their customers remain at the forefront of all our offers.
Driving the contract catering sector is a large workforce of around 163,000 people working in varied roles, from chefs and nutritionists to front-of-house staff.

The workforce is vitally important to the contract catering sector and companies invest a huge amount in training, skills and apprenticeships to ensure they have a highly capable workforce. Staff have to be knowledgeable about the food they are preparing and serving, and fully understand health and safety regulations and hygiene rules.

Training staff in all aspects of food preparation, ingredients and food service has become increasingly important with the introduction of allergens legislation in December 2014 which requires food businesses to provide allergy information on food sold unpackaged.
A career in the contract catering sector can be an exciting and rewarding one. Opportunities to gain experience in different roles and progress through the ranks are vast in this sector. The range of environments in which catering services are delivered offers opportunities for people looking for particular working patterns. For example, parents may find term-time school catering jobs easier to balance with childcare needs.

Case study: Compass Group

Compass Group & Ireland is leading the food industry in driving women’s representation. The company recently launched its “Women in Food” programme: a target for 50% of its chef workforce to be female by 2020.

The company currently employs just under 4,500 chefs, of which 35% are female. This is above the industry average at the time of 18.5%, but Compass is seeking to do more to attain gender equality in a male dominated industry through investing in learning and development for female chefs currently working for the company and those who will be recruited. The company is also reviewing working practices to identify areas where shift work and flexible working hours could be introduced and enhanced opportunities for development from entry level through to senior roles.

A “Women in Food” Board has been set up, which will be responsible for rolling out and monitoring the programme. Members of the board include key personnel from Compass Group UK & Ireland.
Providing value across the private and public sectors

Health and Social Care

Nutrition is vitally important in aiding recovery from illness or treatment in hospital. Worldwide studies have shown that 30-50 per cent of patients in hospital have some degree of malnutrition, which can prolong their stay in hospital and increase the likelihood of complications. Every patient is different and contract caterers can adapt patient meals to individual requirements. Some patients may need a high calorie diet to aid recovery, others may have to avoid certain ingredients. Some may need foods that are easy to chew or digest, or may need low sugar or low fat options.

Catering services are also an important part of the patient experience. Contract caterers strive to offer a range of options and change menus on a regular basis. Meals need to be attractive, tasty and delivered at the right temperature and at an appropriate time to encourage patients to eat. Eating a full meal is often the last thing someone wants to do when they are ill.

Across the NHS, over 300 million meals are served every year to patients, staff and visitors. It is a huge challenge to cater for such large numbers of people with different needs in buildings with varying facilities.
In care homes and in the community too, contract catering services play a role in treatment, such as for dementia. Dementia patients may have trouble recognising certain foods. Research has helped contract caterers to address this, showing that yellow plates are beneficial for dementia patients. Services, such as ‘meals on wheels’, ensure those with health conditions receive healthy meals that can aid them in managing their condition and help them to maintain independence for longer.

**Case study: Sodexo**

As part of its contract at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Sodexo introduced a children’s kitchen to serve the young patients at St Mary’s Hospital paediatric ward. The introduction of the kitchen means that children are able to choose from a wider range of dishes, freshly prepared on site by Sodexo chefs. The new kitchen also caters for children who arrive late on the ward or who are attending an appointment elsewhere in the hospital. Earlier this year, the children’s menu prepared in the kitchen was awarded the Food for Life Catering Mark Bronze Standard, recognising that it meets standards on freshness, sustainability and animal welfare.

Andrew Murray, the head of facilities at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust said; “Our fully equipped kitchen for paediatrics means we are able to prepare children’s meals from scratch, using fresh, unprocessed ingredients. This means parents can rest assured that while their child is in hospital they are well fed, using fresh ingredients, just like they would at home.”
Food and drink has been shown to have an impact on students’ concentration levels and behaviour and, therefore, their ability to learn. Studies have shown that children who eat well perform better at school. For schoolchildren, food and nutrition is vital for their development, and for some, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, their school lunch may be their main meal of the day. Mealtimes also develop social skills.

Contract catering providers offer balanced, nutritious meals to pupils of all ages based around standards developed by government and industry. Many also offer breakfast clubs to set pupils up for the day and drinks to keep hydration levels up.

Teaching children about food, cooking and healthy eating also has a lasting impact as they progress into adulthood. Many contract caterers are involved in cookery lessons, as well as educating pupils about where food comes from and helping parents to learn cooking skills to use at home. In doing so, generations to come will have a better understanding of diet, which should help to reduce the £5.8bn a year the NHS spends treating illnesses caused by bad diet.

In universities and colleges, food services can be a revenue stream, provide job opportunities for students or local people and are a significant part of the student experience. This is becoming increasingly important as students seek value for money from tuition fees, and food services need to reflect the 24/7 lifestyle of students and multi-cultural nature of student bodies.
Case study: Carillion

Carillion provides school meal services to over 200 schools across the country including 104 in Oxfordshire alone. Through its Food & More brand Carillion provides freshly prepared meals from schools kitchens - 75% of food is cooked from scratch from unprocessed ingredients, using locally sourced produce wherever possible. The wholesome nourishing food also ensures children are more attentive during the school day.

In 2015 Carillion achieved the Soil Association’s Bronze Catering Mark and is working towards the Silver standard.

The Food & More programme isn’t just about the meal service itself. It also entails educating children to appreciate where their food comes from such that they feel confident and safe to do their own cooking at home.

Marketing shows that children have a major impact on adult spending patterns; thus if children are demanding more home cooked meals there is an enhanced chance of modifying parental eating habits too. All will ultimately contribute to healthier eating behaviours and help stem the childhood obesity crisis.
Case study: Interserve

As the first caterer to be awarded the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark across all its primary schools, Interserve is committed to delivering more than just great tasting, healthy food. Its objective is to educate parents, pupils and communities about food, farming, health, cooking and its benefits in innovative, fun and engaging ways. In 2015, Interserve introduced The Greens into all of its 238 primary and lower schools across the country, as an innovative communication and educational tool.

The Greens are a farming family of superhero characters, on a mission with the help of their super strength and knowledge, to entice children to eat healthier, nutritionally balanced food. Each member of the family has their own area of focus, which encompasses the farm to fork messages, along with key topics of the environment and social issues.

They now feature in all schools on menu posters, signage and promotional materials designed to increase uptake. When first trialled at a primary school in early 2015, the school enjoyed a 20% increased uptake in healthy school meals.

The Greens is a completely unique approach in the school meals industry, educating on the importance of ethical sourcing and equipping pupils with key life skills to develop a love of high quality healthy food.
Nutrition is a vital part of maintaining the physical fitness required of military personnel, for training exercises and operational readiness. Service personnel also require a balanced diet to mitigate against the effects of poor diet, such as breathing difficulties or heart conditions. To this end, the Armed Forces Food Based Standards are in place. Contract caterers design menus around these guidelines to contribute to a healthy, balanced diet.

Traditionally, food is served to military personnel in the messes. Single service personnel in service accommodation pay a Daily Food Charge of £4.79 for three meals a day. Not only do contract caterers need to deliver high quality, nutritious foods that meet the standards within this price bracket, they also have to ensure meals are attractive to service personnel and meet their expectations to increase take-up.

Alongside traditional mess-style food services, contract caterers and the Ministry of Defence are responding to the preferences of service personnel by introducing Catering, Retail and Leisure options. These can include bars, cafés and convenience stores which are usually open outside of mess hours and sometimes welcome friends and family. This is often a more convenient option and creates a home away from home on military bases in the UK and overseas.

Contract caterers can bring a wealth of experience from other sectors to menu planning and bring new innovations to the dining service to drive take-up, in turn creating economies of scale. For example, traditionally evening meals available in messes were served for a limited amount of time from the end of the working day, around 5.00pm. Recognising this does not meet with the lifestyle of younger service personnel, caterers have put in place more flexible opening times. They can also run loyalty schemes and offers to attract customers.
Case study: Carillion & Aramark

As part of the contract footprint within the MoD, Carillion Services working with Aramark have demonstrated together how a hugely successful partnership has developed with the MoD since late 2006 at what is now known as Northwood HQ (pictured).

Northwood HQ is home to around 1,800 serving personnel and civil servant staff supporting the MoD output for the UK and its wider European and American advisories, resulting in a multinational and multicultural customer base. As part of continued partnering engagements and plans for Northwood HQ, Aramark working closely with Carillion, have significantly invested in the catering outlets that serve all rank profiles on site to enhance the standards of mess life.

Developments in the retail areas have also been improved with the introduction of new brand partners such as Aroma coffee by Nero, and a unique style of restaurant model of cooking indoors on a charcoal BBQ. Synergising menus and offers with the wide demographic of communities that live and work at Northwood HQ have been carefully crafted to deliver an exciting new look and feel in the MoD space, which customers have welcomed as a fresh approach.

Supporting the team in developing bespoke menus has taken a significant investment of time and continued engagement with all parties on site. Having the chance to engage with an already passionate team who are keen to cook great food was one of the most rewarding outcomes of the new good offers at Northwood HQ.
Creating a culinary experience through continued development with food generates a shaper commercial focus, drives consumer advocacy and builds client confidence. Working as one team develops strength in the relationship and partnership between Carillion Services, Aramark and the wider DIO and Joint Forces Command, as successful long term business partners in the defence market space.

Case study: ISS

The Royal Air Force (RAF) celebrates its centenary in 2018 and naturally everyone wants to mark the occasion in a special way. ISS UK, through their Defence business, is currently the leading provider of Catering, Retail and Leisure services to the RAF and, in partnership with serving personnel, have been working on a special celebration cookbook.

100 recipes have been carefully selected to match the places that have enjoyed an RAF presence, both in the United Kingdom and across the world. Military historians have been commissioned to write a supporting piece that will give a unique picture of the development of the Force since its creation in 1918.

ISS Chefs were joined by celebrity chefs such as Cyrus Todiwala to create the dishes which were then professionally photographed by expert military personnel. This has been a three year collaboration, the efforts of which has seen a major publisher make an initial six-figure contribution to the three official charities that will benefit from the year’s celebrations.
Business and industry

The business and industry sector makes up a significant proportion of contract caterers’ client base and ranges from offices and business parks to industrial sites and offshore locations. Clients increasingly want a broad range of catering offers to meet their needs, making this a diverse sector to work in. Offerings include restaurant-style dining, cafés, canteen-style options, retail outlets and integrated facilities management solutions of which catering is a part. And there is a demand for such services; a recent survey of 3000 people in the USA, Canada and the UK found that 80 per cent prefer having a café or dining room at their workplace.

Business-to-business clients are increasingly interested in food services and the impact on the health, wellbeing and productivity of their workforce. Studies have shown a clear link between a healthy diet and improved concentration, alertness, problem-solving skills and productivity. Therefore, what employees eat at work impacts on their performance throughout the day. Having healthy food options available on-site and throughout the day is one way in which employers can encourage their employees to eat healthily.
Contract catering providers also play a role in helping clients achieve their wider corporate responsibility objectives. Sustainability has been a priority for clients for a number of years and caterers can respond by looking at food miles, reducing packaging and using sustainable ingredients in recipes. Other initiatives include providing work opportunities for local people or those from disadvantaged backgrounds, or putting on themed food events for employees, such as around different cultures, to improve morale.

Different business environments create different challenges for contract caterers to respond to. In city locations, caterers will be competing with high street retailers and will therefore need to be competitive on price, menu options and quality. In offshore and remote locations, such as oil rigs, contract caterers need to meet both logistical challenges in getting equipment, chefs and ingredients to locations and menu challenges in providing nutritious meals using ingredients that will need to be preserved for a period of time. Caterers’ expertise in meeting these challenges mean they are well placed to support business and industry clients.

Case study: Sodexo

At Santander Sodexo adapted its food offer to support Santander’s workplace strategy and help the client partner achieve its ambition of nurturing a culture that promotes flexible working and is focused on work-life balance.

Sodexo provides catering and hospitality services to 14,000 Santander employees based at 11 locations across the UK. As part of a refurbishment programme Sodexo developed a new offer which used Santander’s brand values - Simple, Personal and Fair - to influence the tone, design and delivery of the new offer.

Innovative menus have been introduced to reflect the latest food trends and consumer demand for healthy options, nutritional information and seasonality. The collaboration between Sodexo and Santander throughout the refurbishment programme resulted in a solution which delivers nutritious food at great value, every day - all housed in a vibrant and flexible environment.
Sporting and events venues host a range of food outlets, from established retail outlets and restaurant pop ups to contract catered outlets. In these venues, contract catering services are closer to a traditional retail-style offer. In VIP areas, a range of options can be in place including restaurant-style services for the acts, athletes and VIP guests.

At sporting venues in particular, from football grounds to the London 2012 Olympic Games, food services are often seasonal in nature. This presents a challenge for caterers who need to be able to gear up quickly for service, be prepared for high peaks in demand at certain times and employ and train staff for a relatively short period. One option is to have a pool of staff who can work flexibly and rotate between events throughout the year.

Events often carry their own expectations and requirements. Sustainability was a key component of London 2012 and caterers had to demonstrate how they would achieve these objectives in their bids and then in service delivery. At Wimbledon, for example, strawberries and cream is a tradition visitors expect to see on sale.
Case study: Compass Group

Leicester City FC is a 32,000-seat stadium with 45 hospitality boxes, catering for approximately 800 restaurant covers and 1,000 casual diners every match day. The number of customers visiting the club has grown significantly, reaching 32,014 in 2015/16.

The club’s catering team (Levy Restaurants UK, the sports, leisure and hospitality division of Compass Group UK & Ireland), looks after public catering, hospitality, and conferences and events at the stadium. There is a core team of 14 permanent staff and 10 casual managers. During a match day the total catering team grows to 400 people.

The team has worked hard to enhance the customer experience at Leicester City FC. New display equipment has been added, the catering team has undergone enhanced customer service training and menu re-development ensures the food offering keeps up with current trends while also focusing on quality, taste, provenance and sustainability. Pre-match food for players is now also provided, working with the Club’s nutritionists to provide the correct foods for players, including fish, chicken, omelettes, pasta and salads.

While the team regularly works under pressure, they had to adapt to working under the world spotlight due to Leicester City FC’s Premier League winning celebrations in 2016. The final day of the season saw the team:

- prepare a 900-person pre-match Thai lunch in an external marquee, organising Thai chefs from London to cook and fitting new kitchen appliances;
- cater a dinner at the stadium for 650 people, including the owners, managers, players and their guests; and
- put on a VIP party for 400 people after the match.
Why do organisations call on contract catering providers to deliver food services?

**Focus on core activities**
Partnering with an external company to deliver food services enables organisations to focus on their core day-to-day business activities.

**Expertise**
Contract catering providers are specialists in what they do and can be relied upon to deliver services to a high standard. They have experience of delivering services across a range of settings.

**Innovation**
Companies specialising in contract catering will invest in developing technologies and new ways of working to stay at the top of their field, and clients benefit from these innovations.

**Compliance**
Contract catering providers will have a full understanding of all relevant legislation, from food hygiene and health and safety to animal welfare and allergens information, which can be complex.
Contract catering providers will simultaneously be providing services to a range of clients. This enables them to achieve economies of scale and greater buying power with suppliers.

Economies of scale

Contract catering providers employ highly skilled people across a range of roles. Their varied contracts with interesting and often prestigious clients enables them to attract the best staff.

Specialised workforce

Organisations can seek to achieve efficiency gains by subjecting food service delivery to competition from a range of providers. Clients can then select the bid that represents the best value for money.

Efficiency gains and value for money

In addition to delivering food services, providers can deliver related services, such as wider FM services, food education for schoolchildren and work opportunities for local people.

Wraparound services