



## EDUcatering Magazine

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### **Feature: Ovens**

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#### ***What are the key considerations of buying a new oven?***

School caterers should consider their equipment needs in line with current and future menu requirements, pupil numbers and times/peaks in service – for example, it maybe that two smaller, versatile ovens that can adapt to changing service needs are better than investing in one large oven unit. It maybe that catering for KS1 pupils and those on free school lunches will require a slightly different cooking approach where having the flexibility of two ovens at full capacity for this one sitting and then switching to one oven for KS2 pupils could work better for the operation rather than one large oven that isn't quite flexible enough.

Space and installation aspects are also key considerations. It may seem fundamental, but consider the footprint of some ovens in comparison to their potential output. The Smeg ALFA ovens can be stacked one on top of the other – so you can save on space yet double the output. Also many ovens will need hard wiring to a certain KW rating – unique to Smeg is that the range is switchable i.e. they can run off different KW ratings depending on the power on site – anything from 3KW upto 8.3KW making them ideal for any site, there is no limitations.

Whatever the choice of oven, school caterers must carefully consider their purchase. Sturdy, commercial manufacture is a must, anything less won't perform or last! Choose a leading brand with an established reputation – they shouldn't be tempted to go down the cheap import route. They should also consider the availability of spare parts and after sales service, plus what length of warranty is available.

#### ***Do school caterers use their ovens to their full potential?***

This entirely depends upon the current set-up and type of operation and the hours of service and the level and skills of staffing. It is vital that caterers fully understand all the features that their ovens have in order to use them to their full potential. Many school caterers/cooks are fully versed in the capabilities of their equipment and have devised their menus and service offerings across the lunch period in response to this.

Caterers should look at the flexibility of their equipment and how it will work at differing service times. Having ovens that can adapt to these changing needs will help in terms of productivity/throughput, profits and in terms of cost savings too.



### ***What is the one essential piece of oven kit that schools should invest in?***

An oven is a vital piece of equipment in any kitchen, whether it is part of a cooking range or a stand-alone model, it has to be a versatile and flexible workhorse able to make light work of the most demanding and varied dishes and be able to respond to the ongoing changing demands that come with any professional commercial kitchen.

But with schools caterers now facing challenging times in terms of pupil throughput and efficiency in their operation, they need to have a healthy, varied and attractive food offering that they can turnaround in a short meal time and an oven that can 'multi task' and do so in rapid times in response to that will be a good investment.

The Smeg ALFA Range of bake-off ovens provides an innovative and versatile solution. What a lot of people don't realise is that the equipment's flexibility expands way beyond savouries and pastries – in fact there is relatively little that these ovens can't cook!

Alternatively, the rapid and versatile cooking capabilities of the Maestrowave Combi Chef 7 has many features to offer a school's catering operation, including the latest Menu Creator 2.0™ software package, which allows you to 'create your own menu' and programme up to 99 menus using any method of oven, microwave, grill or combination and with or without the turbo fan! This oven is flexible, efficient and easy to use and produces the best results ever, in super quick time – it's really an oven that can do it all and produce consistent results time after time. Fits into a skilled or non-skilled kitchen – simply plug in and go. The CC7 can also be considered as a complementary rapid cooking resource to a larger oven - all from a small table top footprint.

### ***Is it better to stick to one brand of ovens throughout a kitchen or can caterers have a combination of brands?***

The choice is entirely up to the individual catering managers and what their menu needs are and whether one brand can offer the range of ovens required. But in terms of equipment operation and familiarity it is useful to stick with one brand, especially if you find one that works particularly well for you. Having one brand is also advantageous when it comes to servicing and spare part availability.

### ***What are the latest oven technologies?***

The levels of cooking performance are being continually enhanced. Recent improvements in the technologies on the Smeg range is one example - pre-sets are not a new technology, but as with the new Smeg ALFA 144 oven, the technology behind the pre-settings and pre-heating controls is even better.

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Although not new in technology terms, Smeg have just launched new side opening ovens to complement their already extensive range of bake off and catering ovens - ideal where space is at a premium or where kitchen layout is perhaps challenging in terms of having a full pull down door model. Based on the best-selling ALFA43 oven, there will be three electromechanical models: Convection only (model ALFA45); Multifunction (convection, convection + humidifier, static) with pizza stone on the cavity floor + 3 trays 2/3GN above (model ALFA45MFPGN); and Multifunction with normal cavity for 3 trays 2/3GN (model ALFA45MF).

Also, based on the wide bodied versions, as used by a number of the top foodservice companies, there will be two electronic models: Convection only (model ALFA146XE); and Convection + Humidity + Grill (model ALFA146GH).

***Top tips on choosing a new oven...***

To help make the right choice, caterers must be clear on the intended use: the volume of throughput; the types of dishes/menu available; variations in service time; staffing skills and find out about the latest features and operational functions before they invest.

For bake-off ovens specifically: Look for stylish designs for installation in prominent positions and go for high quality stainless steel finish both inside and out; rapid pre-heat function to enable fast recovery after unloading; easy control functions; auto power cut-out to save energy when not in use; programme pre-sets and manual options for ease of operation; cool touch doors; fans for efficient heat circulation; grill function for versatility and the ability to vent that wonderful bakery smell into the premises if required!

With any equipment choice, select a leading brand with an established reputation for good quality and reliability and a supplier with good after sales service, including spare parts and check for a full manufacturer's warranty for additional peace of mind.

RH Hall has an extensive range of Smeg bake-off models to suit all size of operation and requirements can be discussed individually.

***Please include any other comments that you feel our readers will be interested in.***

RH Hall's Foodservice Solutions offer bespoke and tailored solutions for any foodservice brand, concept, menu or operational need.

School caterers can tap into this service and the successful creative foodservice solutions that have been developed already with a number of major foodservice chains and operators, including ready-made packages that offer a simple start up way to launch a

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concept into a foodservice operation – one such example is the package created with Chicago Town for their Pizzas and the Smeg ALFA43UK oven – all the leg work has been done – all the optimum menu timings, products selections have been developed and the package is ready to buy and have installed, up and running, almost immediately.

With RH Hall's access to the most extensive range of foodservice equipment available on the market today, together with our vast knowledge and experience within this sector, we are ideally placed to offer this specialised service. Our development team can work closely with any school cooks/caterers to look at equipment and create new menus, adapt recipes and perfect equipment timings to enhance cook/bake/regeneration results or bring in our tried and tested concepts to also maximise their operation.

***Please include a definitive website address where readers can go for more info on your company.***

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