



## TUCO Magazine

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### **Feature: Ovens**

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#### ***What are the key considerations of buying a new oven for a university catering outlet?***

University caterers should consider their equipment needs in line with current and future menu requirements, student 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 unit or that one larger bake-off oven could cover the breakfast sitting by itself and then bake-off products, such as baguettes, ready to be filled for the lunch service.

They may also offer differing levels of service throughout the academic year so they should also assess this in line with their current catering facilities and any budgets available and look at the potential return in sales this additional equipment could bring as with bake-off 'on the go' popularity and equally any cost savings in terms of energy usage.

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, 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.

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***Are university caterers using 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 university caterers are fully versed in the capabilities of their equipment and have devised their menus and service offerings across the day 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 universities 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 university caterers facing stiff competition from the High street for the student pound, they need to have a varied and attractive food offering and an oven that can 'multi task' in response to that will be a good investment.

The Smeg ALFA Range of bake-off ovens provides an innovative and versatile solution. Savouries, breads and morning goods including the most delicate of products, like croissants, can be cooked to perfection, but what a lot of people don't realise is that the equipment's flexibility expands way beyond that – in fact, there is relatively little that these ovens can't cook! Another big plus is that they look good enough to be sited 'front of house' with the aroma of freshly baking food, helping to maximise sales.

***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.

***Are there any new technologies coming to market?***

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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Also Smeg introduced models with the oven chamber lined in refractory stone to combine traditional cooking methods with modern technology to enable the foods to develop further in flavour whilst cooking – creating dishes with sublime tastes!

Smeg are launching new side opening ovens to complement their already extensive range of bake off and catering ovens. 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). These new ovens will be available from early October.

#### ***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.

University 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 a university's own chefs/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.***

For more information, please visit [www.rhhall.com](http://www.rhhall.com)

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