

Facilities Management from A to Z

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
published monthly in Facilities by Lexis Nexis between 2008 and 2016

C atering

Catering is one of the Big Four services (along with cleaning, maintenance and security) that comprise a big part of the average facility managers portfolio. For some this means the minimum legal provision of clean drinking water and somewhere for employees to eat their own food for others a fully fledged staff restaurant and catering service. The development of an appropriate catering provision involves consideration of many factors such as the location, size and nature of the facility. The starting point is the creation of a catering policy and strategy that lays out the reasons for making such provision and the principles to be addressed in designing the service.

The catering policy will need to consider the level, if any, of subsidy that the organisation is prepared to invest. Some organisations provide a range of fully expensed meals, drinks and dining services as part of the employees remuneration package. In sectors where the attraction and retention of talent is an issue such benefits can be influential. Another organisation may be more concerned with teamwork and productivity and prefer to keep staff together on the premises during their lunch break. Where premises are situated away from other facilities there may actually be little choice and catering provision will have been included in the site selection. Some employers may simply be concerned about the health and wellbeing of their staff. Reduced levels of stress, improved morale, lower sick absence are all benefits that can be related to a positive staff welfare policy.

The food and service industry with a value of £4 billion forms a significant portion of the support services sector. Contract catering comes in many forms providing services to offices, factories education, healthcare and sporting facilities among others and the companies involved employ around 2.5 million people. The sector is dominated by a small number of major players however there are also many smaller firms for those who prefer to source locally.

Catering provision may be limited to a staff restaurant or canteen but is often extended to include coffee or sandwich bars, refreshment trolleys, meeting hospitality provision and vending. Where bundling of services is adopted catering is included in the "soft services" bundle along with cleaning and security or contracts may be extended to include other front-of-house services such as reception, concierge or meeting room management.

There are significant health, safety and compliance issues involved in the handling of food and the reduction of this risk is the deciding factor for many organisations when considering outsourcing. The larger companies also have access to large economies of scale in the purchase of supplies and equipment which can offer major cost reductions if the savings are passed on to the client.

The specialist nature and complexity of catering contracts has led to the increasing importance of the specialist catering consultant. Their expertise can be extremely useful in the procurement, benchmarking and operational audit of food service contractors.

Advice on the selection of a catering consultant can be obtained from the FCSI (Food Service Consultants International) www.fcsi.org.uk Other useful reference points are the HCIMA (Hotel, Catering and International Management Association) www.hcima.org.uk and the European Catering Association (ECA) www.ecagb.co.uk