

Top Tips for the Delivery of Universal Infant Free School Meals

- ✓ Ensure that the menus provided meet the School Food Standards – check the School Food Plan for details. When considering each dish for inclusion, in addition to equipment, hot-holding and storage capacity, think about how it can be presented in a way that will make it most attractive to customers – earthenware dishes, baskets and individual dishes may make them seem more appealing.
- ✓ Make suppliers work hard to retain your business. Always return any poor quality produce. In case of supplier failure, have ingredients for a standby menu in your store cupboards and freezers. Ask suppliers how best they can support you when holding theme days and promotional events.
- ✓ Plan your food orders carefully. Constantly having to place additional orders because you have forgotten something makes you appear unprofessional and inconveniences your suppliers unnecessarily. It also means that your team spend a disproportionate amount of their valuable time checking off and putting deliveries away.
- ✓ Think carefully about how kitchen equipment is actually used. Do not hang on to unnecessary equipment. If not used frequently, consider removing or replacing with a more flexible alternative. Deep fat fryers for example, are high maintenance and need constant supplies of expensive oil. If only used once per week, a combination oven might prove to be more useful and economical option. Create and maintain and adequate repairs, maintenance and replacement budget.
- ✓ Make sure you have adequate plans in place to cover any temporary staffing shortages. In addition to the standby menu, make sure all staff are sufficiently trained so that they can safely produce the meal in the absence of any key member of the team. When fully staffed, in order that the training is not forgotten, make sure that they change duties on a regular basis.
- ✓ Batch cook, wherever possible – particularly fresh and frozen vegetables. This helps maintain both their appearance and nutritional value. Do not overcook and remember to allow for the additional cooking that hot holding will provide. Brown, overcooked vegetables will not encourage greater take up.
- ✓ Have confidence in your menu offer. Do not diminish it by say, attempting to please everyone by removing the fruit from puddings and serving it separately. Schools have a responsibility to encourage their pupils to eat healthily and broaden their diets. Consequently, in this instance, a better option would be for Cooks and Kitchen Managers to approach the school and ask for their support in gaining greater pupil acceptance. Always remember that teaching staff will have more influence and more opportunities to influence pupil behaviours.
- ✓ Each week, make someone responsible for reviewing the presentation of your servery from the perspective of the customer. Those being served at the beginning of service may have a very different experience from those at the end. For this reason, make sure that each day, the review takes place at a different time. Pay particular attention to:
 - Food temperature – cover hot food during any lulls in service. If food should be served cold, hold it under refrigeration until the very last moment. If possible, serve cold food and drinks from table-top or free-standing chilled units.
 - Half empty containers – even during a busy service, half empty service dishes can give the impression of left-overs. Better to use smaller dishes which can be topped up frequently.
 - Ensure that your customers can actually see the food on offer. However short on space you are, avoid hiding food around the back so that customers have to ask for it. If the service counter is too high,

consider displaying attractive free-standing photographs of the dishes on offer. If sample plated meals dishes are used, make sure that these do not dry up over the course of lunch.

- Look to the high street for inspiration. Introduce self-service wherever possible – bread can be served piled high in rustic baskets, tossed salad from attractive bowls, individual tubs (disposable or otherwise) or salad ingredients from a trolley. Consider piling biscuits and cakes into glass jars or on to cake stands. Use doilies and dish papers as appropriate. Some hot puddings could be presented in a similar way if served at an ambient temperature and topped with hot custard. Keep salads and fruit bowls topped up right until the end of service. The cost of any waste will be marginal and will probably be offset by an increase in sales.
 - Make sure that you (and where self-service, customers) use the correct service tools for the job. Use tongs rather than dessert spoons for salad etc. – and that you have sufficient supplies.
- ✓ Demonstrate to your customers that your hygiene standards are beyond reproach. Check that cutlery, crockery, trays and glassware have been washed properly. Your customers will be put off by any remaining food debris. If your dishwasher leaves water stains on the cutlery put up signs explaining this. To prevent them from smelling, allow trays to dry thoroughly before stacking. Keep the servery spotlessly clean and free from clutter throughout service.