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Learning from the best: Excellence in Hospitality and Catering at Exeter College

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Brief description

The Michael Caines Academy (MCA) at Exeter College provides training and developing for the next generation of high-quality hospitality and catering professionals, in partnership with leading employers and suppliers. Students study for recognised qualifications but also complete 'experience' visits and a longer-than-usual period of work-experience.

Overview – the provider's message

'For many years the number of young people choosing catering courses has been declining. Regional experts in the sector told us that they struggled to recruit staff with the right skills and attitudes. School leavers were rarely choosing careers in the hospitality industry. They saw it as very hard work with poor rewards and limited career prospects. We wanted to change that perception and to establish a centre of excellence to train future recruits to the industry.

With the help of one of our former students, Michael Caines, the renowned two Michelin-star chef, we brought together the college's executive chefs, the highest quality regional food producers and suppliers and prestigious hotels and restaurants to set up the Michael Caines Academy.

It was important to have a rigorous and competitive selection process. We wanted to attract young people with a real passion for the industry who demonstrated the



potential to develop the skills to become the best professionals. It took time and effort to attract sponsorship, develop working partnerships and improve resources, but we now have a thriving centre of excellence that attract the brightest and best local recruits to hospitality and catering. We have raised the profile of careers in this sector and increased our student numbers.'

Tricia Pugsley, Head of Faculty of Hospitality, Hair and Beauty

The good practice in detail

The Michael Caines Academy (MCA) at Exeter College specialises in training and developing the next generation of high-quality hospitality and catering professionals, in partnership with



leading employers and suppliers. From its rigorous and competitive selection process to its industry-standard equipment and facilities and its close working with partners through master classes and demonstrations, the Michael Caines Academy has raised the profile of hospitality and catering and offers high-quality training to aspiring professionals in this sector. The awarding body, City and Guilds, has worked with the college to support a condensed programme that creates capacity for extended work

experience.

The Academy allows students to develop and hone their skills:

- using the latest, industry-standard facilities and equipment
- attending regular master classes from top-quality local suppliers and renowned chefs having the opportunity of a six-week work placement in a top hotel or restaurant each year.

Hospitality and catering staff at the college also value the continuing professional development and updating derived from working with their academy sponsors and partners.

A clear line of sight to work

From the beginning, potential recruits learn what it's like to work in the industry. All applicants go through a rigorous and competitive two-day selection and initial assessment process which focuses on identifying:

- passion and enthusiasm for hospitality and catering
- restaurant skills
- dexterity and food knowledge
- potential and ability to learn in the industry.

Around half the applicants go through to the second day where they face an 'Apprentice'-style interview panel with college staff and industry professionals to ensure the recruitment of the highest quality students with a clear commitment to the work.

All those who do not gain a place at the academy are offered the opportunity to join one of the college's other hospitality and catering courses, thereby raising the profile and increasing student numbers in the department overall.

Once through the selection process, academy students enjoy enhanced opportunities to experience what it's really like to work in the industry.



- They visit and work alongside the very best local food producers, cheese makers, butchers, fishmongers and game producers.
- National and international Michelin-starred chefs and culinary artisans provide master classes and demonstrations in the college's new training kitchen and at some of the most outstanding restaurants and hotels in the UK.
- Many Academy students are also involved in high-profile, external events and competitions with skilled industry professionals including 'Chef of the Year', 'Exeter Food Festival' and the preparation of a dinner for the launch of the Williams Formula One team at its headquarters.

“ We have improved our presentation and communication skills and our confidence so much as a result of being involved in these events. ”

An Academy student

At the end of each academic year students have a mandatory six-week work placement. The excellent reputation of the academy gives them contacts with and access to some of the country's most prestigious hotels and restaurants while the length of the placement enables them to experience what it feels like to be a real employee, either in the kitchen or 'front of house'. Some choose a high-quality local restaurant or hotel which enables them to remain near their families. Others relish the opportunity to move to a large city or even abroad for six weeks.



The college takes the feedback from employers about students' progress during their placements very seriously and takes this into account when considering their suitability for the next stage of the programme.

‘We are so lucky to have a world-class food, drink and hospitality sector on our doorstep and the range of training at the MC Academy provides us with the opportunity of a successful career with good prospects.’

An Academy student

Dual professionals

The Academy staff are trained teachers with significant and varied occupational experience and expertise which they use very effectively to challenge and stretch their students. Above



all, it is their enthusiasm for and commitment to the hospitality and catering industry which they successfully convey to their students. They believe in **‘exposing students to excellence every day’** and it is this passion which has helped to develop the collaborative work with their wide range of expert partners.

- A wide group of partners provide students with outstanding opportunities to visit the very best hotels and restaurants and to watch demonstrations by, for example,

chocolatiers, patissiers and sommeliers.

- They offer ‘hands on’ workshops including wine-making, foraging, producing cheese and butchering venison and other meats.
- Visits to a local abattoir, fish market and vegetable producers ensure that each student is aware of ‘pasture to plate’ and is in touch with the food source.

Industry-standard equipment and resources

The college already had a busy college training kitchen and restaurant. However, thanks to sponsorship and the support of the governors, including Michael Caines, students of the academy now develop and practise their skills in a new ‘master chef’ style kitchen complete with video capture and live streaming. Students practise in their individual work areas of the kitchen, each fully equipped and complete with the latest oven and induction hob.



A commitment to the two-way street

- Sponsors and local suppliers give their time and expertise willingly to provide demonstrations and presentations to students. Video screens around the kitchen enable all students to watch the demonstrations in great detail.
- Presentations are recorded so that students can catch up if they miss one or view something again if they need to consolidate their learning. The college has advanced plans to stream live video demonstrations on its website and in its restaurant to enhance the facility further and raise the profile of hospitality and catering.



Sponsors and suppliers offer students at the academy discounts on some of the essential equipment they need to purchase such as sets of high-quality kitchen knives. They use some of the very best produce available in the region, which they prepare alongside Michelin-starred chefs and outstanding practitioners. The executive chef tutors at the academy, highlight the importance of the academy's 'farm to fork' ethos instilling a respect among the students for the highest-quality and locally produced ingredients.

Provider background

[Exeter College](#) is a large tertiary/ GFE college offering a broad curriculum at all levels to young people and adults from the City and from across the county of Devon. The college has eight sites, including two major city-centre campuses and three specialist training centres on the outskirts of the city. It is a major provider of apprenticeships, offers significant number of part-time programmes to 14 to 16-year-olds from local schools and has a well-established range of higher education courses. The college offers a substantial amount of provision in 12 subject areas, the largest of which are mathematics and science, modern foreign languages, literature and culture, arts, media and publishing and leisure, travel and tourism.

Background

It's about work... the summary report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) highlighted characteristics and features of outstanding vocational teaching, learning and assessment. These are in line with the criteria for judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Ofsted's [Common Inspection Framework for FE and skills 2012](#), but also focus on the additional, distinctive processes of design and delivery which characterise excellent vocational provision.

The case studies in this set were compiled in response to the CAVTL report which highlighted the importance of ensuring a 'clear line of sight to work' on vocational programmes.

[The Education Training Foundation](#) has been asked to take forward the recommendations from the Commission's report.

Other examples in this set

Barking and Dagenham (employability): www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140003

Barking and Dagenham (motorsport): www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140004

Bridgwater College: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140005

Foxes Academy: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140006

Hull College: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130258

Leeds City College: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140007

People and Business Development Ltd: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140009

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140008

Wendy Shorter Interiors: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140010

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice