

High five for Catering Design Group at the University of Sunderland



Catering Design Group (CDG) has completed a £1.1m design and build project at the University of Sunderland where the design company has transformed five individual spaces into eating and meeting destinations across two of the university's campuses, three miles apart.

Working closely with the on-site caterers, Elior UK, who cater for more than 12,000 students across nine food and drink outlets at Sunderland University, CDG's brief was to ensure maximum uptake of the services by creating multi-functional social spaces for use by students, staff, visitors and member of the public.

The designs had to reflect the University's existing Scandinavian-style concept in their Gateway Building and Library buildings while ensuring a unique identity for each of the spaces.

Phil Howard, managing director of CDG, said: "This was a huge and exciting creative challenge. While being mindful of the overall concept, we had complete freedom to create new, vibrant eating and meeting spaces that had to flow seamlessly from day to night."

The project took 2,240 man-hours to complete and it involved all aspects of design and refurbishment, from designing and constructing new layouts to the design and installation of lighting elements, tiling and flooring, as well as furniture, kitchen design and fit-out, counters and decorative finishes.

“Each of the five spaces held its own challenges,” said Phil. “For example, in ‘The Studio’, we were asked to transform a former dance studio into a food destination that would work in day-time and in the evening.

“We saved and refurbished an original sprung timber dance floor and enhanced areas with supplementary tiled flooring to demarcate certain areas.”

CDG’s innovative design included servery counters with under-mounted heated tops that transform into ‘a hidden bar’ at the touch of a button using three electronically controlled hydraulic rams contained in the counter.

CDG also transformed an existing storage cupboard within the area into a fully functioning support kitchen for The Studio, including new walls, flooring and cooking equipment.

In ‘the Restaurant’ and ‘The Balcony, the designers used a completely bespoke designed and manufactured lighting scheme. This included varying sized laser-cut profiled aluminium tiered bubble-shaped decorative pendant lighting suspended from a track lighting gantry and obscured Perspex LED tubular lighting illuminated on four sides suspended from a curved high-level ceiling.

As CDG was undertaking the works, the majority of the projects were in occupied buildings shared by students and teaching staff, so the team had to be mindful of noise, access routes for deliveries and Health & Safety requirements.

“This was a diverse, multi-site design project requiring ingenuity and innovation throughout,” said Phil.

“We drew on years of experience within the commercial restaurant and kitchen business to make each of the five spaces work in its own right – while working collectively under the University of Sunderland’s ethos and styling.”

Footfall and revenue have increased by circa 20% since the completion of the design works.

The increased social spaces for meetings and hospitality have been welcomed by students, staff and visitors. For example, catering staff report that they are now seeing academic and other university staff who previously used meeting rooms now use the eating spaces for meetings. The Studio at the University's city centre campus is attracting more members of the public who use the facility by day and for evening socialising.

"It just shows the impact that great design can have on a community of people," said Phil.

Mark Hall, Build & Install Mobilisation Director, UK Elior, said: "The professionalism and resilience of the Catering Design Group (CDG) team had a massive impact on this ambitious design project at the University of Sunderland.

"We have had a longstanding relationship with CDG over many years and their work on other educational design projects, including the University of Roehampton, illustrated their understanding of the higher education sector and its unique challenges. We knew that we would be in safe hands and that they would do everything possible to help us to realise our client's vision at the University of Sunderland.

"What continues to impress us is their vision, innovation and the relationships they built with our team, the client, contractors and suppliers.

"They understood the commercial objectives from the outset and used their creativity and experience to add practical and aesthetic design elements to transform five spaces over two campuses."

Phil Howard said: "this project demonstrates that size doesn't matter when it comes to a design consultancy, but creativity does. We are a relatively small design consultancy with a reputation for building long and lasting relationships with our clients – and with our suppliers whom we see as vital to our success.

"We were fortunate to work with some great suppliers throughout this project who understood our challenges and rose again and again to fulfil their promises. We couldn't have done it without them."