

FM i D

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University Facilities Management

SUITABLY SUSTAINABLE

Sustainability champion Ant Wilson wants the industry to go above and beyond the minimal requirements

BE CAREFUL UNDERFOOT

Winter is here and university grounds can become treacherous

MEDICINAL MEASURE

UEA's new medical research and teaching facility gets a check-up

CASHLESS COW

The future of payments is here: and it's cashless



FIT FOR KING'S



Following his involvement in a **THREE-YEAR CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROJECT** with King's College, London, training and **DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT STUART GRAHAM** explores the benefits of the **STUDENT-AS-CUSTOMER MODEL**



Reputation has always been a key factor in choosing a university. However, since student fees hit an all-time-high of £9,000 per year, the expectations of today's student goes beyond academic standing. They now demand better facilities and an improved student experience.

Over the last few years, I've spent a lot of time advising and offering support to the higher education sector and it's become increasingly clear that universities need to focus their efforts on customer service, if they are to deliver the student experience that's now demanded of them.

Because of the high cost of university fees, students – and their parents – are placed in the role of consumer, empowering them to speak out when expectations of standards are not met.

In the past, a bad student experience could result in negative 'word-of-mouth'. Today, customer complaints are increasingly channelled through public social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, potentially resulting in a harmful tweet or post going viral.

A recent survey, published in July 2015, identified that two thirds of UK students said facilities were a key factor in choosing their university. The research, published by the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE), found that facilities were rated higher than reputation, in terms of influencing university choice.

King's College London has always had an academically prestigious reputation. It's currently 27th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. But despite its world-class status, early in 2012 the university acknowledged that it needed a renewed focus on customer service.

John Iveson, assistant director of customer and commercial services at King's College London, explains:

"We commissioned a mystery shop of the service provision across each campus, based on key behaviours such as welcoming, engaging, helpfulness and problem-solving. The results gave credence to our belief that the frontline facilities management services needed to improve its customer service culture."

I was commissioned as an external customer service change-management coach to work with the directorate of estates and facilities (E&F) on a three-year project; the vision of which was to create 'world-class services for a world-class university'.

The university employs 700 staff and contractor staff in the E&F directorate. They serve 27,000 full-time students across five campuses at the Strand, Waterloo, Guy's, St Thomas' and Denmark Hill. The brief was to encourage a more professional and efficient organisation, and to support internal departments to allow them to deliver an enhanced student experience. A project team was formed and the programme, entitled Fit for King's, was launched in April 2013.

Our aim was to embed the Fit for King's culture into the wider E&F team, meaning that staff training was a central part of the process. Working closely with the E&F teams, I designed, developed and delivered a long-term culture change programme.





This included a customer service leadership programme for management and a 10-module workshop training programme for all staff. Each workshop was designed to support and underpin the behaviours and approach needed to fulfil the new standards and commitments.

Training passports record the progress of every member of staff. After each workshop, individuals sit down with their line manager and highlight three learning objectives, recording how they will implement them into their job role. The training reaffirms key messages around the Fit for King's commitments, such as being naturally friendly and positively interacting with students. Staff are encouraged to go over and above the standard delivery and those that demonstrate exceptional performance are rewarded.

One of the cornerstones of Fit for King's was the 'one team' approach. Contract partners currently total 61% of all E&F staff, including cleaning and security, so having an inclusive approach was paramount to offering a consistent customer experience.

Fit for King's was never about paying lip service. To date, more than 4,000 hours of training has been delivered by in-house trainers. The programme has been developed to bring about actual change and create a truly customer-focused culture. To assess its success a measurement programme has been put in place using internal mystery assessors.

Providing feedback on the results, Iveson adds:

“Team members are recognised for their performance and commitment to world-class customer service through recognition awards”

“Fit for King's has been instrumental in changing how the Estates & Facilities team think about customer service. The shift in culture over the past three years has been significant and we now have an engaged high performing team and wider collaboration with our contract partners.

“Team members are recognised for their performance and commitment to world-class customer service through recognition awards, and since February 2014 there has been over 30 award winners.”

During the last two years the success of Fit for King's has also been recognised externally. In 2014 it won a BIFM award – the professional body for facilities management – in the category of FM Excellence in a Major Project. It was awarded to King's College and Bouygues Energies & Services for their partnership efficiency review.

And most recently, it was highly commended in the category of Impact on Customer Service at the BIFM Awards 2015. King's College London being the only education establishment to be honoured in the awards.

The UK's university market has seen dramatic changes in a short period of time, including the removal of a cap on student numbers and changes to



the funding model, resulting in an increase in competition between universities. In today's consumer climate, universities can no longer simply rest on their reputation; my experience of the Fit for King's project is evidence of this.

King's College London understood that its vision of 'world-class services for a world-class university' rested on its capacity to provide a consistent student experience. The student-as-customer model does not aim to commercialise the student experience, it encourages a customer-focused environment to help the student to develop, grow and thrive at university.

Stuart Graham of SGM Graham Ltd is a leading independent training and development professional. With 25 years' experience in the training and development industry, Stuart specialises in working with organisations that aim to develop their service culture and improve communication and interpersonal skills. www.stuartgraham.net ■

