

FOR MANY OF OUR CUSTOMERS THE CAFÉ IS THE ENGINE SHED: IT'S THE MOST VISIBLE AND BEST KNOWN OF ALL OUR SERVICES. THE OPEN SERVING AREA CREATES A LINK BETWEEN CUSTOMER AND KITCHEN AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE FRIENDLY AND LIVELY ATMOSPHERE THAT MAKES THE ENGINE SHED SO SPECIAL.

A Day in the Life of the Catering Manager

“My day starts around 8.00am. First thing is to get everything switched on – the cooker and hot water boilers – and do all the routine food safety checks.

Next is to get the quiche bases in the oven. We make quiche every day and if we took it off the menu there would be ructions. The pastry is prepared the day before – it's easier to work with if it has had time to rest. We make three quiches a day, sometimes four if the hospitality unit needs it. That's at least 24 portions per day.

Trainees arrive anytime after 8.30am and start work just before 9.00am. On a Monday we allocate certain jobs for the week: doing the tables, making the fruit salad or setting up the counter ready for opening. Everyone knows what they have to do.

Meanwhile, I have to get the scones ready for opening time at 10.00am. The scone mix is made up the day before and one of the trainees will usually roll it out and cut it for me ready to go in the oven. We recently came up with a new fruit scone recipe – with grated apple, grated banana and fruit juice, no added sugar – and these have been really popular. Customers said ‘these scones are lovely, can I buy some to take home!’

Once the quiche bases and scones are cooking I get started on the main courses. Today it is cottage pie – an Engine Shed favourite. In a busy kitchen you have to get as much as possible prepared the day before: we made the vegetable filling for the cottage pie yesterday and blast chilled it, and potatoes for the topping were peeled yesterday ready for cooking this morning. Potatoes only take 20 minutes to cook but a huge pot takes an hour to come up to the boil.

At 10.30am trainees start going for their tea breaks. By then the first of the main courses has to be in the oven to be ready for noon. Hot food is served up to 3.00pm and we batch cook everything one after the other to make sure it's as fresh as possible throughout service. It is very important to get the timings right.

I'm generally too busy to take a morning break but one of the trainees usually brings me a cup of coffee. Once it gets to 11.45am and I'm getting lunch ready to go out though, everyone knows not to speak to me. My

background is in the army and I'm used to a very different environment. The trainees sometimes call me 'wicked dad!'

During lunch service the trainees will help to serve and clear the tables, and have their own lunch break. I usually have mine about 2.00pm: I go out to a local café for a ham and cheese roll most days.

As a meat eater, and someone trained in the traditional French style, I'm used to things being highly seasoned and I've had to learn to use the natural flavours of the food more. This is in fact very much the modern way, to let the ingredients speak for themselves.

In the afternoon the trainees are kept busy: they prepare vegetables for the next day, tidy up the kitchen and café, wash up, put stores away, clean fridges or make garnishes. There is always something to do.

From around 3.00pm I start doing all my managerial tasks, like looking at new recipes, menu planning, liaising with staff in the other units, small repairs and everything else that needs done.

The café is not completely organic but we use as much as possible. Once a week we get a vegetable delivery from organic suppliers Grow Wild. This includes a lot of the basics that we use every day like carrots, onions, potatoes, leeks, swedes etc. Around 75% of our dry food is also organic, including flour, rice, pasta and pulses and this is delivered weekly by Green City.

We're always trying to get ahead of ourselves by good planning. Monday is the hardest day as most things have to be started from scratch, though the Saturday Café staff will do some basic stuff for us if they are quiet.

By the end of my army career I was running catering for the army in the whole of Scotland, but I find working at the Engine Shed quite tough. The trainees are all very different and you have to know how to treat each one individually. Some you've got to tell to shut up talking about what they did at the weekend, others are very quiet and need constant reassurance that they are doing things correctly. But their willingness to work and learn is fantastic and it's very rewarding to see them changing and growing. That is really good.”

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