

## University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is a research university and a founding member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities in Britain. The main campus is located in the Highfield area of Southampton and is supplemented by four other campuses within the city.

The University of Southampton currently has circa 22,000 undergraduate and 5,000 staff, making it the largest university in the South East region.

## Background

The University of Southampton will be investing heavily in its infrastructure in the next few years, particularly on the Highfield campus. This has implications for the way in which the university functions and operates, and one of the key areas it will impact is in the delivery of catering services.

Given the significant changes that will take place, the university engaged the services of Litmus to conduct a strategic review to develop a new customer proposition and catering vision and strategy.

## Brief

The University is embarking on a 10 year development strategy to modernise its estate which is supported by an extensive capital investment programme. In addition to addressing existing infrastructure improvements, some of this money will be invested into the development of catering services with the aim of providing a 'best in class' customer experience.

The University appointed a catering consultancy to assist in the preparation of a strategy document that, in the context of the 10 year development strategy, would determine the future provision of student, staff and visitor catering across its academic and residential UK campuses.

The objectives Litmus was briefed on were:

- ▶ To identify, on the academic campuses, the optimum number, size and type of retail outlets, including automatic retailing (vending) and where they should be located to provide the best possible retail mix;
- ▶ To evaluate the catering provision needs of students residing in Halls of Residence, with particular emphasis on the Glen Eyre and Wessex Lane residential campuses; and
- ▶ To present a report of findings and proposal to senior University personnel.

## Approach

**Nigel Forbes, the Litmus Partnership, said:** "We undertook extensive primary and secondary research, including one-to-one interviews with 18 key stakeholders, feedback from catering users and non-users in an in-depth Consumer Insight survey, observations of campus and high street trends, and an in-depth look at the university's current services and future expectations.

“Amongst the reports we accessed were: Business Models in HE Catering – a comprehensive report into the UK catering environment (prepared by The Litmus Partnership for TUCO in 2017); Selling price data research (conducted on behalf of TUCO by The Litmus Partnership in 2017); and gross profit and labour cost data (taken from catering reviews carried out by The Litmus Partnership during the last 18 months at nine universities).”

## Outcomes

Litmus recommended the creation of a central hub that will act as a heart of the University, offering life, interest and a natural place to go – a destination.

Food offers will need to match the cultural and ethical mix of the students whilst also being attractive to staff and visitors.

Catering outlets should be designed so that any number of them can open to reflect life on campus and contribute to extending the length of the campus day.

The campus wide catering offer will need to incorporate:

- ▶ A food court offering a variety of specific food offers;
  - ▶ Street food that reflects modern, fashionable and great value dining;
  - ▶ Interesting spaces for students to dine, work and relax;
  - ▶ A table service restaurant, providing a more relaxed dining experience;
  - ▶ A more exclusive restaurant offering a higher standard of food and service;
  - ▶ Cafés providing ‘local destinations’ to eat in or grab-and-go;
  - ▶ A mix of recognised brands, generic food offers and local authentic and specialist foods;
  - ▶ Sustainable sourcing and operating principles; and
  - ▶ A welcoming approach to students that wish to provide their own food.
- ▶▶ *I am delighted! You guys have knocked the ball out of the park. The report references student opinion, sector experience, sustainability, detail and financial models. All bases are covered and this is all stuff that we couldn't have done in-house so it more than justifies the cost of using a consultant such as yourselves. ◀◀*

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