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Investigating the Views of Staff to On-Campus Catering in a Third Level Educational Institution

On-campus provision and catering has become a very important part of campus life for both staff and students. The aim of this study was to investigate the views of staff to on-campus catering in a large third level educational institution. There was a response rate of 68% from all categories of staff.

A comprehensive investigation of existing trends in the food and beverage sector in general and on-campus is provided in this study analyses in a literature review.

The results of the survey concur with the secondary research of on-campus catering in the UK. The findings of this research have implications for a number of stakeholders; however, the greatest impact will be on the providers of catering provision on-campus in order to meet the needs of respondents. The results show that there is a need to provide good quality catering at a value price on-campus.

Keywords: trends, food and beverage, on-campus catering, campus life, Third level educational institution, influencing factors, University campus management

INTRODUCTION

The Dublin Institute of Technology and the Grangegorman Development Authority (Ireland) are building a new campus at Grangegorman in Dublin's North Inner City. The new campus development will consolidate all of the Dublin Institute of Technology's activities from 39 separate sites into one single campus by 2020. In order to inform the different aspects of this development a number of consultative processes are being carried out. Catering and retailing is one of these processes as there are plans to develop both on campus. The research was carried out to assist decision making and ultimately to improve standards of on-campus catering provision.

Secondary research was carried out on the trends impacting on the food and beverage sector in order to inform the catering and retail provision of trends impacting on catering with a focus on campus catering. An analysis of the competitive environment was carried out in the vicinity of the new campus. The overall aim of this study was to investigate the views of staff and students to on-campus catering in a large university. The focus of this particular paper is on the views of staff to on-campus catering; those employed in academic roles, (12%) in academic management, (7%) in administration management, (26.5%) in wider administration including technicians and (11.5%) and members of the estates management division were surveyed with a response rate of 68%.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The food and beverage service sector is subject to numerous trends and these trends have an impact on business success or decline. A trend is defined as 'a line of general direction of movement, a prevailing tendency of inclination, a style or preference, a line of development, or the general movement over time of statistically detectable change' (Google Thesaurus, 2014). Whereas, a fad is considered to be a temporary popular notion, artistic activity, fashion or food that is usually followed by a large group of people for a short period of time (Google Thesaurus, 2014).

According to Flynn (2013) the changing face of the food and beverage service sector suggests that the type of operation will change. In the UK the scene is changing to street food, trendy pizza and craft beer bars, tapas and sharing dishes, a growth in the 'food to go' sector and sustainability. Whereas in the US, there is an increase in

morning / 8am snacking, growth of Italian street food, with global flavours influencing dishes. Australian trends include making food from scratch but with prepared ingredients, using local and flavoursome ingredients as opposed to shipping long distances, introduction of processes to manage delivery and keeping staff numbers low (using IT in creative ways), and a focus on quality and a growth in gourmet coffees. This is supported by Gahan (2013) and Bord Bia (2014) who suggest that consumers are looking for value offerings, expect operators to allow customers to customise their choices from the menu, and value and quality are key to success where consumers want to get the most for their money. Consumers are looking at affordable indulgences, eating more at non-traditional meal times and seek snack and mini-treat foods (Gahan, 2013).

Bord Bia (2013; 2014) indicate that the trends in food service operations are towards the fast casual provision with tapas and small plates / sharing predominating. They also suggest that operators need to modernise the menu by offering a 'twist' on the traditional dish, provide more vegetarian options, streamline processes, use more technology, and that health and artisan and craft offerings are attractive to consumers. This is supported by Carter (2013) when she indicated that the growth coming out of a recession is in the casual dining sector (brasserie style). Operations need to have a casual offering but be modern and trendy and that the traditional old world foods are making a comeback but with a modern twist. The growth sector according to Carter (2013) is the growth of bakeries in cafes and gourmet coffee shops in stores and shopping centres.

Trends in food and beverage service and provision on-campus is changing. The number of people who will use on-site facilities on a campus is estimated to be 20% of the total of students and staff on campus per day (Times Higher Education, 2014). According to research carried out in 2014 on the UK University sector, fewer students live in catered accommodation with increasing numbers of students living at home, with male students twice as likely to live at home as females because of the increased cost of Education in the UK (Aramark, 2014). The majority of students who eat out are looking for value due to being on a low budget; however, this value is not just about pricing (Times Higher Education, 2014). The students considered a number of key criteria that delivers great value and include quality, taste, expectations exceeded, price, generosity of portions, promotions and service (Insights into University Life, 2014). The university students have indicated that healthy options are important with more females indicating that healthy food is important to them. Consideration is given to fat content, calories, salt and sugar levels and free range products especially proteins (Aramark, 2014).

The research indicates that students either eat breakfast where they live or skip breakfast altogether, with three-quarters of students indicating that they never eat in the university café / refectory. Off campus breakfast choices include the local convenience store, local sandwich bar, local café, coffee bar chain, and petrol, bus or train station. The students have indicated the reason why they use off campus facilities for breakfast is because they are cheaper, provide better quality and are more convenient than the university cafes. Research carried out by Times Higher Education (2014) suggest that 21% eat breakfast at home, with only 7% eating in halls of residents and 3% using cafes / restaurants on campus. The research also found that the vast majority of students skip one or more meals a week with breakfast being the meal most skipped.

The Insights to University Life Research (2014) has highlighted that a third of students never use the university campuses for lunch; a significant rise from those using the facility in 2011, while the Times Higher Education (2014) research suggests that 30% of students will buy lunch once a week on campus, of that 30% foreign students are more likely to buy lunch than UK students. The research also indicates that those living at home are more likely to be loyal to on-campus catering than those living away from home. Again the competition appears to be the local convenience stores, sandwich bars, chain coffee houses and supermarkets because the students believe they have lower prices, better quality, are convenient and provide a wider variety of offerings.

Of those who use the university campuses, healthy food (79%) is the preferred choice with soups, interesting sandwiches and wraps, baked jacket potatoes with fillings and pasta dishes being popular. Less than 9% opt for a roast traditional dinner. Waters, juices, smoothies and hot beverage are chosen over fizzy drinks. The research also indicated that on-site university campus catering is viewed negatively by students citing unhealthy, stodgy, unappetizing, and processed the reason they do not use the university cafes (Insights into Campus Life, 2014: Times Higher Education, 2014). Indeed, O'Connor and Russell (2012) suggest that the student satisfaction with campus catering on offer is very low. The range of food on campus, the quality of the food and value for money all scored below 3% in terms of satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

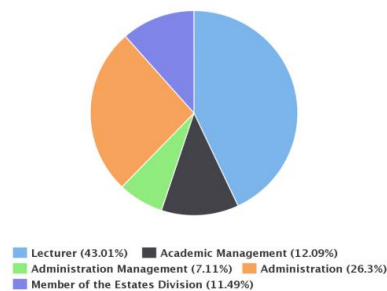
The overall aim of this study was to investigate the views of staff and students to on-campus catering in a large third level educational institution. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the views to catering provision on-campus varied. A detailed analysis of the views of staff to on-campus catering had not been carried out previously in

this Institute. The research question centered on: What are the views and opinions to on-campus catering? What trends could impact on the provision? Both staff and students using on-campus catering were considered. This particular paper focuses on the views of staff to on-campus catering. The researchers sought to survey as many of the staff using on-campus catering facilities as possible. An on-line questionnaire was administered. The survey questionnaire sought to investigate a number of factors in relation to catering currently on-campus across the Institute and to establish requirements for catering into the future. The focus of this paper is on the views of staff to on-campus catering; those employed in academic roles, (12%) in academic management, (7%) in administration management, (26.5%) in wider administration including technicians and (11.5%) and members of the estates management division were surveyed. A total of 1,360 staff responded to the survey from a total sample of 2,000, representing a response rate of 68%. A number of key issues were investigated and include a profile and background to respondents, the usage and frequency of on-campus provision, influencing factors when choosing meals, factors of importance when choosing food, rating of on-campus catering across the university and suggestions for future provision and facilities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

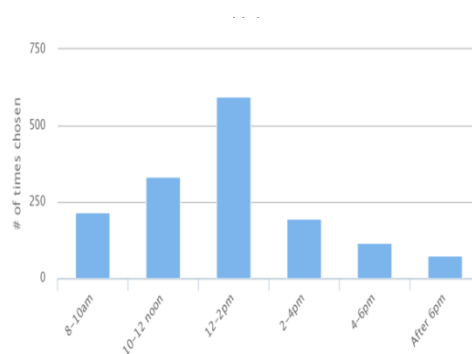
The staff questionnaire sought to investigate a number of factors in relation to catering currently on-campus across the University and to establish requirements for on-campus catering for the future. The research sought to identify respondents roles across the Institution with 43% of respondents employed in academic roles, 12% in academic management, 7% in administration management, 26.5% in wider administration including technicians and 11.5% members of the estates management division. The research shows that the majority of respondents hold academic roles. Figure 1 illustrates the employment roles.

FIGURE 1: Employment Roles



The research shows that only 20.7% of respondents use the on-campus catering facilities once a day and that 72% of respondents use the facility between 12 noon and 2pm as presented in Figure 2.

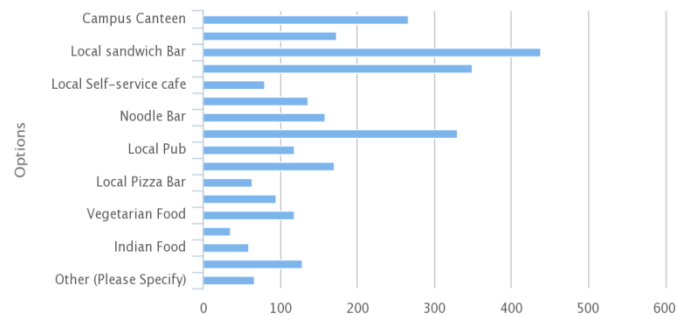
FIGURE 2: Times on-campus catering facilities are used.



It is apparent from the research that respondents use a variety of provision for food during the working day with 69% of respondents indicating that they bring in food and 57% use the local retail shops. The limited campus provision has been cited as the main reason staff buy food off-campus or bring in food.

The research had highlighted that the local sandwich bars, newsagents, supermarkets and local coffee shops are popular with respondents. The research suggests that the provision of healthy food with choice and variety is limited on-campus. It is also suggested that the local provision off-campus is very good, offers competitive pricing, variety and choice and meets the health needs of respondents. The findings are consistent with the findings of Flynn (2013); Gahan (2013); Board Bia (2014) and Carter (2013). Figure 3 sets out the factors and options influencing the type of food purchased during the working day.

FIGURE 3: Factors and options influencing the type of food purchased during the working day



The research provides an indication that price and value for money is important to respondents at 73.9%. Other factors perceived to be important are quality at 65.8%, healthy options at 63% and choice at 54.9% of respondents.

The research provides information on the amount spent on food during the working day with the majority of respondent indicating that they spend under €3.00 on breakfast, under €3.00 on beverages and under €5.00 on lunch (Figure 4). The majority of respondents will walk from 5 to 10 minutes for food and up to 5 minutes by 39% of respondents (Table 1), suggesting that price spend and distances are important and catering needs to be positioned close to where respondents work. The primary research concurs with the research carried out in the UK by Insights into Campus Life, 2014: Times Higher Education, 2014 and O'Connor and Russell (2012).

FIGURE 4: Amount spend on food during the working day

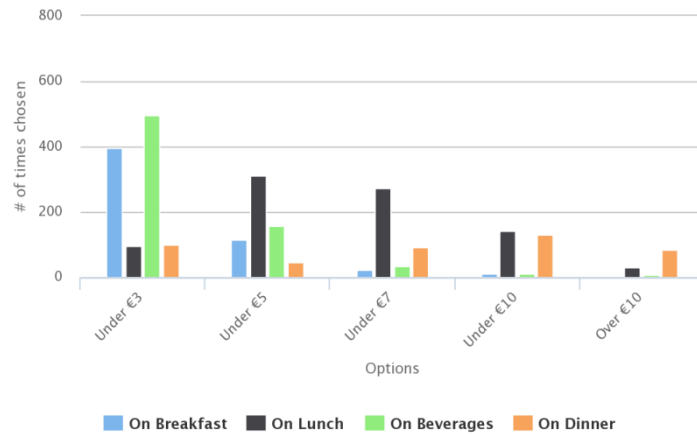


TABLE 1: Distances staff will walk to purchase food

Distance	Percentage of Respondents
1-2 Minutes	10.9%
Up to 5 minutes	39%
5-10 minutes	44.5%
Over 15 minutes	5.4%

Respondents indicate that they have a preference for meal / bundle deals at 40%. Respondents also indicate that they have very little time to prepare food (49%), therefore, they purchase food at work. Over 54% of respondents suggest that it is convenient to eat out while at work, 41.7% consider it a chance to catch up with colleagues and friends and 76% do not like cooking. These findings are important for catering providers to consider when planning food provision and facilities.

The research suggests that opening times of catering facilities are only acceptable to 34% of respondents and 32% of respondents' rate opening times to be poor to very poor. The menu choice is acceptable to 33% of respondents but is considered to be poor to very poor by 55% of respondents and healthy options are considered to be poor to very poor by 64% of respondents. Fifty-four percent of respondents rate dietary considerations to be poor or very poor. Further, 54% of respondents consider price to be poor or very poor with only 18% of respondents suggesting price to be good. Value for money is considered to be poor or very poor by 42% of respondents and good by 26% of respondents. These are considerations for catering providers to address.

The research shows that respondents have not responded positively to the food being provided on-campus. This suggests that quality, variety, price and healthy nutritious food are areas of concern for respondents. The primary research concurs with the research of Aramark (2014) and Campus Life (2014).

Staff were asked to indicate the factors that they perceived to be important to them when choosing to purchase food during the working day. Respondent were asked to respond to a variety of options. Table 2 sets out the most important factors.

TABLE 2: Factors of Importance

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
No time to prepare food to bring in	408 (49.22%)	303 (36.55%)	118 (14.23%)
Too tired to make something at home	249 (30.86%)	327 (40.52%)	231 (28.62%)
Convenience	446 (54.86%)	280 (34.44%)	87 (10.70%)
Working day is too long	227 (30.72%)	269 (36.40%)	243 (32.88%)
Chance to meet up with friends/colleagues	321 (40.94%)	327 (41.71%)	136 (17.35%)
Feel like a treat	217 (28.07%)	339 (43.86%)	217 (28.07%)
More choices to eat locally	304 (40.59%)	277 (36.98%)	168 (22.43%)
No time to prepare	300 (40.98%)	273 (37.30%)	159 (21.72%)
No point in cooking just for myself	87 (12.12%)	166 (23.12%)	465 (64.76%)
Cheaper to eat out nowadays	97 (13.51%)	203 (28.27%)	418 (58.22%)
Not good at cooking/don't like cooking	52 (7.34%)	117 (16.53%)	539 (76.13%)
Nowhere to safely store food brought in	303 (40.56%)	203 (27.18%)	241 (32.26%)

Finally, respondents suggested that Mediterranean food, vegetarian food, Asian food and a pasta bar be considered at between 30% and 40% of respondents. The research shows that 63% of respondents' currently enjoy private catering facilities for staff at their locations. The majority of these facilities have hot and cold running water, a microwave, a fridge, a coffee machine, a water burco, a toaster, cutlery and crockery and a hand-wash sink. Respondents have also indicated that private staff facilities are a requirement for staff and tea / coffee and drinking water should be provided complementary. Respondents have indicated that they need a facility away from students in order to interact with colleagues, visitors and external examiners. The respondents suggest that these facilities be professionally maintained and cleaned like any other room on-campus. A facility that provides good food at reduced rates but also allows staff to bring in their own food appears to be the choice of the majority of respondents. Overall, it is clear from the research that catering provision on campus needs to meet the needs of staff and students. It appears from the research that staff appreciated the opportunity to participate in a survey on catering in their workplace. The primary research concurs with the research carried out in the UK by Insights into Campus Life, 2014: Times Higher Education, 2014 and O'Connor and Russell (2012).

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research it is possible to propose a review of on-campus catering within the Institution which if adopted will lead to the development of on-campus catering that meets the needs of all the stakeholders, caterers, staff and students. Potentially this will also open up the catering to non-college customers thus enhancing campus life. From the findings of the research it is clear that staff views to on-campus catering provision is mixed, therefore, caterers and estates management need to review the trends that impact on choice in order to develop an enhanced on-campus provision.

Consideration of the relationships between stakeholders is important and the research provides an opportunity for collaborations with the catering providers, estates management and a staff committee to further develop the on-campus provision.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The intention of the study was to contribute to the body of knowledge on staff attitude of on-campus catering in a large educational institution of 20,000 staff and students. The research presented views at a particular time. The research is limited in that one methodology was used within one third level educational institution.

It would be interesting to carry out the same research at a number of different universities for a comparative analysis.

Focus group research would allow for the survey findings to be further substantiating the findings of this study.

It would be important to carry out research with the providers of on-campus catering to compare their views with the staff views of on-campus catering.

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