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

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

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the views of students to on-campus catering, student preferences with food and to gather information and opinions on the current catering provision in a large third level educational institution. The survey sought to ascertain factors influencing the type of food eaten by students, the type of establishments frequented for food, spend trends, how far students would walk to purchase food, the meal most frequently purchased during the college day, and factors important to students when eating out while at college. A questionnaire was administered to all students.

A comprehensive investigation of existing trends in the food and beverage sector in general and on-campus is provided in this study analysis in a literature review. The results show that there is a need to provide good quality catering at a value price on-campus throughout the day and evening during the academic year.

Key Words: trends, food and beverage, on-campus catering, campus life, student life, third level educational institution, influencing factors, University campus management.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Dublin Institute of Technology and the Grangegorman Development Authority 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 paper is on the views of students to on-campus catering. The questionnaire was administered to all students using an on-line tool (LTT Survey). A total of 923 students responded to the survey from a total sample of 19,000 representing a response rate of 4.86%.

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, an artistic activity, a fashion or a 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 FINDINGS

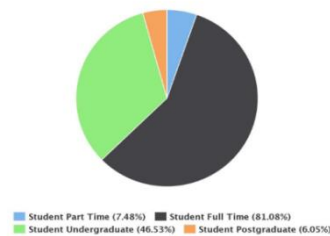
The overall aim of this study was to investigate the views of staff and students to on-campus catering in a large third level educational institution. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the views to catering provision on-campus varied. A detailed analysis of the views of staff and students to on-campus catering had not been carried out previously in this university. 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 the students to on-campus catering. The researchers sought to survey as many of the students 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 Institution and to establish requirements for catering into the future.

A number of key issues were investigated and include a profile and background to respondents, the usage and frequency of on-campus provision, how far students will walk for food, 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

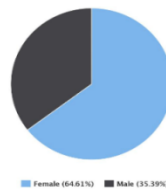
The student questionnaire sought to investigate a number of factors in relation to catering currently on-campus across the University and to establish requirements for on-campus catering for the future. The first section of the questionnaire sought to identify whether respondents were part-time or full-time students of the Institute, their location and gender in order to provide contextual information on the respondents. Question one sought to establish part-time or full-time status with 81% of students being full time and 7.8% part time. Not all student ticked whether they were undergraduates or post graduates. The research shows that the majority of respondents are full time students. Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown of part time and full time students.

Figure 1: The Breakdown of Full-time and Part-time Students



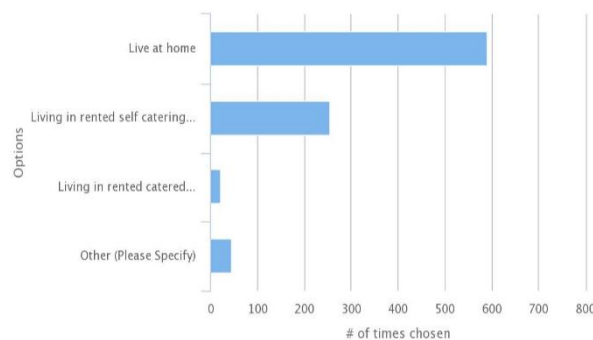
The next question established the gender of respondents with females representing 64.6% of respondents as set out in figure 2. The majority of students were within the age range of 21-25 at 44.9% and 33% were under 20 years of age.

Figure 2: Gender of Respondents



Over 64% of the students live at home with 27.9% living in rented accommodation as highlighted in figure 3.

Figure 3: Students Living Status



This section of the research sought to establish usage of on-campus catering by students. The times that facilities on-campus are most frequently used are analysed, the alternatives students choose for food provision throughout the college week is established and the range of establishments chosen off-campus are highlighted. Table 1 sets out the responses to the usage of on-campus catering facilities.

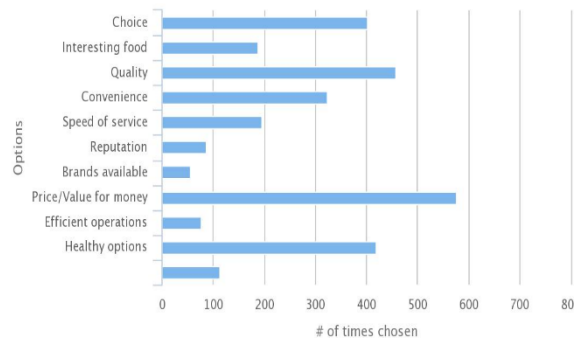
Table 1: Usage of on-campus Catering

<i>Usage</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>
<i>Once a day</i>	<i>22.5</i>
<i>Twice a day or more</i>	<i>10.1</i>
<i>Once a week</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Twice a week</i>	<i>17.7</i>
<i>Once a month</i>	<i>6.4</i>
<i>Infrequently</i>	<i>21.3</i>
<i>Never</i>	<i>10</i>

The research shows that 21% of students use the catering facilities on-campus infrequently with 10% indicating that they never use on-campus catering. Only 22.5% of students use the canteen once a day. This low frequency usage is noted. In addition, it was apparent from the research that respondents use a variety of provision for food during the college day with 69.8% of students indicating that they bring in food and 69% use the local retail shops. The limited campus provision has been cited as the main reason students buy food off-campus or bring in food. This concurs with the secondary research literature.

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); Bord Bia (2014) and Carter (2013). Figure 4 sets out the factors and options influencing the type of food by students purchased during the college day.

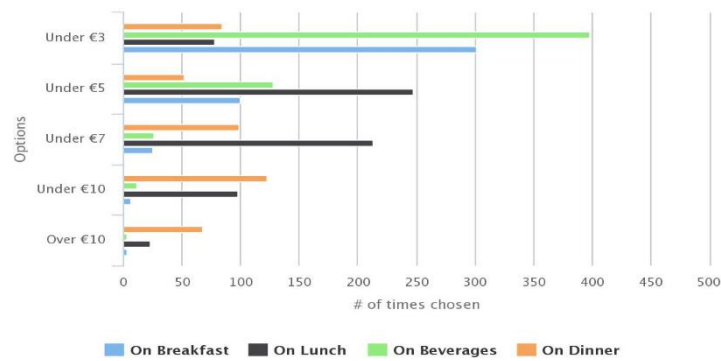
Figure 4: Factors influencing the type of food purchased during the college day



A total of 82.7% of respondents indicated that price and value for money was the factor that most influenced them followed by quality at 65.5%, healthy options at 60.3%, choice at 57.6%, convenience at 46.4% and interesting food at 26.9%.

The amount respondents spend on food during the college day is illustrated in figure 5. The majority of respondents spend under €3.00 on beverages at 70.32%. In addition, 69.2% spend under €3.00 on breakfast, with 22.99% spending over €3.00 but under €5.00 for breakfast. Thirty-seven percent of students spend under €5.00 on lunch, 32.3% spend over €5.00 but under €7.00 on lunch and 14.87% spend over €7.00 but under €10.00 for lunch and 28.87% spend under €10.00 on dinner. Interestingly 19.72% spend under €3.00 on dinner during the college day, 23.24% spend over €5.00 but under €7.00 on dinner during the college day. This suggests that the majority of respondents spend under €3.00 on breakfast and beverages and under €5.00 on lunch

Figure 5: Amount spend on food during the college day



In the next section respondents were asked to indicate how far they would walk to buy food during the college day. Table 2 illustrates the distance students would walk to purchase food.

Table 2: Distances students will walk to purchase food

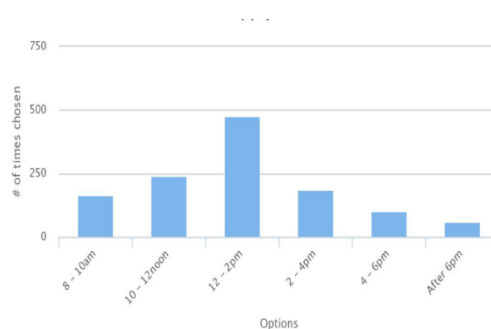
<i>Distance</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>
1-2 Minutes	10.2%
Up to 5 minutes	37.2%
5-10 minutes	43%
Over 15 minutes	9.5%

Table 2 shows that over 43% of students will walk up to 10 minutes to purchase food during the college day with 37% indicating that they will walk up to 5 minutes to purchase food. This would suggest that facilities need to be accessible and close to student hubs. 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).

Students indicate that they have a preference for meal / bundle deals at 48%. Respondents also indicate that they have very little time to prepare food (48%), therefore, they purchase food at locally or in college. Over 55.6% of respondents suggest that it is convenient to eat out while at college, 44.89% consider it a chance to catch up with friends and 74% do not like cooking. These findings are important for catering providers to consider when planning food provision and facilities.

The times that the on-campus facilities are used were established with the next question. Figure 6 sets out the time spans and indicates that from 12-2pm is the time most students frequent on-campus catering facilities at 72%. Thirty-eight percent of respondents use the facilities from 10am-12 noon and 26.2% and 29.4% use the facilities between 8-10am and 2-4pm respectively. From this it is clear that between 12 noon and 2pm catering facilities are at their busiest, suggesting that lunch is the meal most frequently purchased by students.

Figure 6: Times on-campus catering facilities are used.



The research suggests that opening times of catering facilities are only acceptable to 32% of respondents and 29% of respondents' rate opening times to be poor to very poor. The menu choice is acceptable to 29.8% of respondents but is considered to be poor to very poor by 51% of respondents and healthy options are considered to be poor to very poor by 55% of respondents. Forty-three percent of respondents' rate dietary considerations to be poor or very poor. Further, 49% of respondents consider price to be poor or very poor, 26.7% consider price to be acceptable with only 18.8% of respondents suggesting price to be good. Value for money is considered to be poor or very poor by 46% of respondents and good by 17% of respondents. These are considerations for catering providers to address. In addition, the primary research concurs with the research of Aramark (2014) and Campus Life (2014).

Finally, in this section students were asked to indicate the factors that they perceived to be important to them when choosing to purchase food during the college day. Students were asked to respond to a variety of options. Table 3 sets out the most important factors.

Table 3: Factors of Importance

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
No time to prepare food to bring in	322 (48.22%)	265 (39.67%)	81 (12.13%)
Too tired to make something at home	222 (33.59%)	276 (41.75%)	163 (24.66%)
Convenience	366 (55.71%)	235 (35.77%)	56 (8.52%)
Have a part time job as well as a full time college course	257 (40.47%)	158 (24.88%)	220 (34.65%)
College day is too long	222 (35.74%)	256 (40.13%)	154 (24.14%)
Chance to meet up with friends	250 (38.76%)	290 (44.96%)	105 (16.28%)
Feel like a treat	157 (24.61%)	286 (44.83%)	196 (30.56%)
More choices to eat locally	229 (36.23%)	221 (34.97%)	182 (28.80%)
No time to prepare	270 (42.59%)	257 (40.54%)	107 (16.88%)
No point in cooking just for myself	78 (12.52%)	140 (22.47%)	405 (65.01%)
Cheaper to eat out nowadays	78 (12.34%)	183 (28.96%)	371 (58.70%)
Not good at cooking/don't like cooking	53 (8.59%)	106 (17.18%)	458 (74.23%)
Nowhere to safely store food brought in	274 (42.95%)	184 (28.84%)	189 (28.21%)

From table 3 it is clear that a variety of factors are important to students when choosing to eat out during the college day with over 48% indicating that they have no time to prepare food, 41.69% are too tired to prepare food to take to college, 55.62% find it convenient to eat out, 40.41% have a part time job as well as a full time college course, 40.06% suggest that the college day is too long so they have to buy food, 44.89% indicate it is a chance to catch up with friends. Additionally, 44.76% suggest that eating out is a chance to have a treat, and 36% indicate that there are a lot of choices to eat out locally so why not do it and 43% indicate that there is nowhere safe to store food brought in to college suggesting that a student common room with the appropriate equipment and facilities is required.

Finally, a number of suggestions for catering and food provision for have been provided by students, they included a breakfast bar, a coffee bar, juice and smoothie bar, gourmet sandwich bar, a bakery, a burrito bar and gluten free food bar. Students made a number of comments with regard to catering at the end of the survey. The comments consider price, quality, dietary requirements, choice and healthy options all of which must be considered by caterers providing food currently.

Overall, it is clear from the research that catering provision currently is acceptable in some instances but the provision needs to meet the needs of students. It appears from the research that respondents appreciated the opportunity to participate in a survey on catering. 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).

While this paper focuses on the student feedback a summary conclusion to the student and staff surveys suggests that both the student and staff survey are quite similar and that both stakeholders require a catering provision that provides value for money, choice, variety, quality and healthy options. The expectation is that catering will be an important part of college life.

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 student 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 student views 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 with students 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 student views of on-campus catering.

It is recommended that the research be carried out on a regular basis, possibly every two years.

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