

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

Buoyed by surpluses that have doubled in the space of five years, the University of Nottingham has recently invested £7.5m in its catering outlets. Its winning formula is all about listening to customers and giving the high street a run for its money.



When you've built a reputation for being ahead of the curve the challenge is to stay there and not to become complacent.

The University of Nottingham was the first to open a Chinese restaurant on campus, Man's Gourmet. This was soon followed by the Item 7, an African-Caribbean themed restaurant run by one of its former MBA students.

It's also the only university outside London to have a kosher retail outlet and will open a gluten free, vegan restaurant in 2018.

The key is to remain 'restless', explains catering operations director Jonathan Hamblett. 'We are working very hard to come up with solutions that meet student expectations.'

That's no mean feat when you're running what in pure catering terms is the largest operation in the UK's higher education sector - taking in 53 outlets (42 run in-house with a combined turnover of £14.4m).

Nottingham city centre, just a 10-minute drive from the University Park campus, has in recent years become renowned for the quality of its cafés, bars and restaurants. The challenge for Jonathan and his team is to match - and even exceed - what's on the high street.

That task was given a welcome boost by a four-year £7.5m refurbishment programme encompassing all of the university's bars, retail outlets and halls catering.

'It's a significant investment by the university,' he says, particularly given the current tough climate.

'We have taken the opportunity to reposition much closer to what students find in the high street but we are still priced below the high street and well below regional HE peers.'

The approach has been based on market analysis and concerted efforts to understand what students want. The University of Nottingham has one of the

most international student populations in the country, partly due to having campuses in China and Malaysia with 6,219 and 4,866 students respectively.

Students from there typically spend part of their time studying in Nottingham and that has driven a fresh approach to campus catering.

'We have a very high proportion of Chinese and Malaysian students. We recognised we weren't catering for them and they were telling us that in their return surveys.'

Authentic South East Asian menus have been introduced in halls catering and retail outlets have changed their offer to better reflect international students' tastes.

Both Man's Gourmet and Item 7 are outsourced to local businesses but the University of Nottingham remains largely an in house operation, sourcing exclusively from TUCO frameworks.

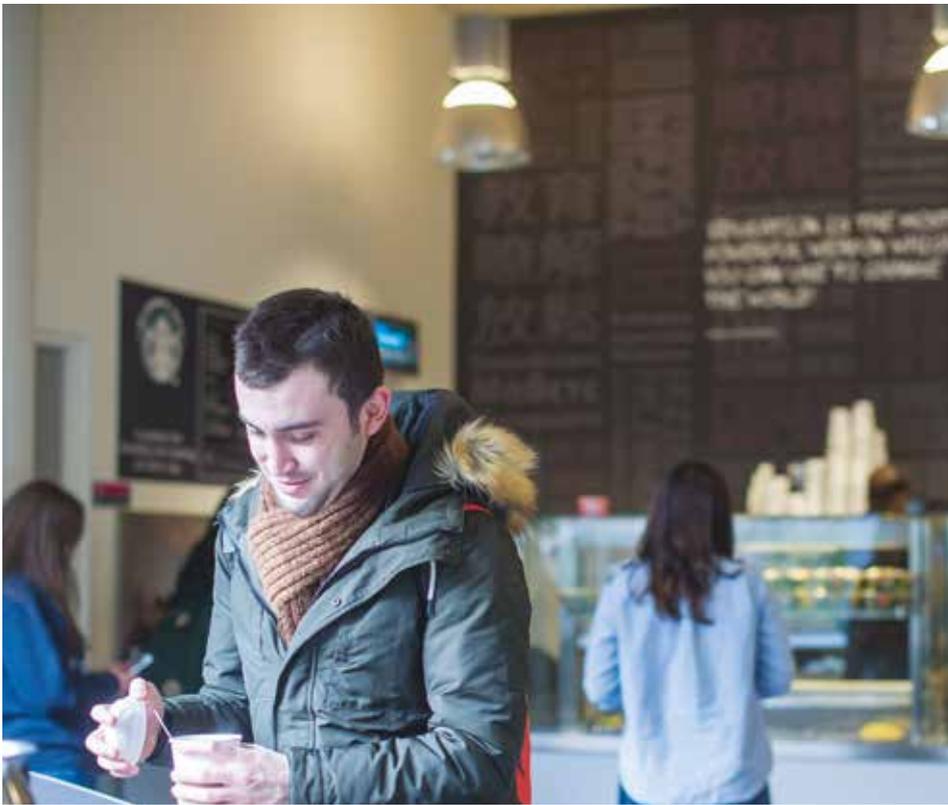
It's a question of finding the right fit and having a great team, Jonathan explains.

'We will outsource when it makes sense. For example, we have a very commercial students' union and they run bars and



SPEND THROUGH TUCO FRAMEWORKS

TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£5.019m
CASH SAVINGS	£385,738
PROCESS SAVINGS	£24,000
TUCO ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION	£100
TOTAL NET SAVINGS	£409,638



UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

33,435 students (in the UK)

700 (285FTE) hospitality staff

42 catering outlets

£14.4m catering turnover

£1.904m surplus

Spar shops both in partnership and in competition with us. We've also brought In-house Starbucks licensed stores and multiple Costa and Starbucks "proud to serve" units, again to lift standards and the student experience in the best way possible.

'If we don't have the confidence that we can deliver it ourselves to the highest level we will look elsewhere for the best possible solution. This has sometimes involved looking at the bigger picture and recommending brave decisions.

'For example, challenging longstanding but dated trading and service assumptions, or closing nine hall bars to focus financial and management resources onto five remaining campus bars - to great success. Also, inviting the student union's four outlets to participate as partners in

supporting our catered halls retail meal plan - again to great student approval.'

That approach is paying off. Last year the university's hospitality operation delivered a surplus of £1.9m. Catering revenue has increased from £11m to £14.4m over the last five years without any significant price rises or student number increases during that period.

'It's because we have constantly repositioned ourselves. It's pretty simple, we sell things that the customer wants to buy. Our surplus since 2011 has more than doubled even after depreciation, management charges, franchise fees and other commercial costs.

'We have a great team here, we have some genuine talent and very professional approaches to service, excellence and growth.

'I think the impression the HE sector often has is that all students are impoverished and everything has to be as cheap as chips. But many students will upscale if it's good quality and it's what they want.'

One example he gives is coffee. The university recently held a mini competition to find a new supplier to improve the quality of coffee across its cafés.

'Many students would increasingly rather have a couple of great coffees each day than four or five dull and lifeless coffees.

'Ultimately, it's high street driven. Students looked at our little eight ounce cups and could see it's not going to last a lecture, it's too small. They want what's on the high street so that's what we try hard to give them.'

ABOUT TUCO

TUCO is the leading professional membership body for in-house caterers operating in the higher and further education sector and is used by universities and colleges throughout the UK. It provides a platform where members can Share and celebrate achievements; Learn via a range of courses, professional advice, training and study tours; Grow their business through latest market research, trends and analysis; and Buy via TUCO's EU compliant catering frameworks and wide range of suppliers - maximising value through the combined £150m annual spend of TUCO members.

Find out more about TUCO

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The University Caterers Organisation