

## Update on Bucks Students' Union Catering and Hospitality Services

On 1 September 2025 Bucks Students' Union, partnering with BNU, relaunched the catering and hospitality services across the High Wycombe and Uxbridge campuses with the following objectives:

- Deliver more student friendly menus, suitable for our broad community.
- Make eating on campus more affordable and create a great value experience.
- Utilise the catering facilities more creatively, driving footfall and improving the 'buzz' on campus.
- Create more paid working opportunities for students.
- Reduce the annual subsidy by controlling costs, protecting margins and improving turnover.

With a relatively short period in which to work we effectively transferred staff, set up new accounts, re-branded parts of the offer, developed new menus and promotional mechanisms, partnered with new brands and trained a new student team ready for the opening period.

Since then, we have achieved a 5-star food hygiene rating, opened the first café in the historic Brunel Engine Shed, catered for external events, conferences and exhibitions and continued to evolve the offer.

### *the* kitchen



**The Kitchen** (formally Beeches) is now open seven days a week and we are exploring more options to expand the hot food service and experiment with opening times.

We've had significant success with culturally focused menus, specifically throughout Black History Month in October, and have been able to support a whole new programme of events in the adjacent Winter Garden, which now leads to our new community garden, [Rusty's Retreat](#).



Whilst introducing the popular high street Costa Coffee brand to enhance the offer, we have also reinvigorated the hot food offer and salad bar and made extensive changes to the 'meal deal' options alongside an average reduction in pricing of c20%-30%. The meal deal options are priced at either £2.99 or £3.99 and represent a great saving to both students and staff.

Even with the reduced selling prices, we are heading into the end of the first quarter of the financial year c10% up on cash sales whilst we estimate the volume and footfall has risen by a pleasantly surprising 40%. There's a notable increase in student activity throughout the catering spaces, and an improved atmosphere on campus.

Across the portfolio we are currently maintaining margins of c40%.

## THE LOUNGE



**The Lounge** (situated in the Students' Union social space) offers a wide ['pub grub' and burger menu](#) and remains popular although has lost some footfall to 'The Kitchen'. The transition to the Starbucks coffee brand, to allow the new space to serve the more popular Costa coffee, has had a demonstrable impact. The Lounge also caters for our free evening food provision which last year served nearly 9,000 free meals to our student community as part of our ongoing cost-of-living support programme.

## pulse



**Pulse** (at the [Uxbridge Campus](#)) has also seen the popular return of the Costa Coffee brand, which retails on campus at a significantly lower price than the high street. With an overhaul of the menu, and a welcome introduction of the more affordable 'meal deal' range, sales are buoyant and in line with expectations. Students are happy with the improvements, but we continue to struggle with service delivery in a space that cannot accommodate all students on campus when their breaks align.



## BRUNEL ENGINE SHED HIGH WYCOMBE



The **Brunel Engine Shed** is a huge opportunity for us to develop hospitality services, although presently the café services a low volume of footfall. Plans are afoot for a greater promotional push for external hires of the multi-functional space which will drive business, and we are also supporting with licensed trade, event services and production. Please view the [promotional video](#) we made for one of the University's newest facilities.



**Rusty's Roadhouse** is a 50's style airstream caravan situated outside our main social space, [The Venue](#), serving freshly made sourdough pizzas throughout the day and into the early evening as well as supporting late night events programme. [Rusty's Roadhouse](#) has received glowing reports for food quality and value but, as yet, services a reasonably low demand. We are now considering a reimagining of the offer, a review of opening times and a different menu for late night trade.

**Hospitality services** support internal meetings and events to external hires and conferences. Developing BES opportunities represents a potential area for growth for the overall service, as we establish our wider offer we will turn our attention to developing this side of the business further.

### **Student staff**

Nearly 20 members of the student community have now worked with us in the catering and hospitality department, from waiting to coffee service and assisting the chefs in the kitchen. This number will grow significantly as the year progresses.

Our student team are paid at the Real Living Wage rate, are fully trained, including certified food hygiene and barista courses, and their rotas are always sympathetic to their University commitments.

We anticipate being able to provide over £50,000 of paid work to our members across the trading year in this department alone.

### **Summary**

Whilst there are still minor teething problems and opportunities to further improve the service, the transition has been largely successful.

Areas for consideration are:

- Reconfiguration of the Kitchen servery and pay point layout to allow smoother, more efficient service.
- Develop onsite bakery offer akin to Greggs/Wenzels.
- Improving hot display/servery in the Kitchen equipment to enhance quality.
- Introduce a heavy promotional push for the Brunel Engine Shed Space.
- Reimagine weekend refreshment provision.
- Evaluate Rusty's Roadhouse offer and opening times.
- Work with the University's estates team to improve the commuter kitchen and refreshment offer at the Aylesbury Campus.
- Support the University's events team to grow conference trade and external hire, both at the Brunel Engine Shed and at the High Wycombe Campus, to drive hospitality revenues, further reducing the annual subsidy.

Assuming we successfully land the proposed summer school contracts for June and July 2026, we anticipate meeting our targets for a significantly reduced annual subsidy, saving the University in excess of six figure sums whilst meeting our wider objectives.