# Food facts and information

Staff and students at the University often ask us questions about the ethical, sustainability and other aspects of catering at the University. We hope the following will help our customers to understand some of the challenges that we face in trying to meet their expectations.

## Public Sector Procurement Regulations

Firstly, it should be noted that almost all food and beverages purchased by Catering fall under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 which require us to follow set tendering procedures to ensure that we get best value for money for the University.

The regulations do not permit us to take the supplier's location into account when awarding contracts as any capable supplier within the EU is entitled to tender for our business.

## Ethical Trade

The University is proud to have held **Fairtrade status (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/community/university-campus/retail/fairtrade.aspx)** since the end of 2003 and was the second UK University to achieve this. The status has been renewed annually thanks to the efforts of students and staff on the Fairtrade Steering Group. The Fairtrade Foundation requires us to improve year on year to retain status by selling more Fairtrade products and holding events to promote Fairtrade. Any member of staff or student is welcome to join the Fairtrade Steering Group and attend meetings which are held at least once per term – please contact Jane Colbourne – j.a.colbourne@bham.ac.uk.

The range of Fairtrade products has increased almost every year since we became a Fairtrade University. When new products become available we make a decision about whether to trial them in our outlets. However, as with any product we de-list any products that don't sell.

**Most coffee and all bananas sold by Catering are Fairtrade.** A wide variety of other Fairtrade products available in our catering outlets and Fairtrade wines are offered on our wine lists.

## Sustainability

We work with our nominated suppliers to continually improve the environmental impact of what we use. For example **eggs used by Catering are free range** and have been since September 2007. Because of this the University has been given a Good Egg Award by Compassion In World Farming. More eco-friendly disposables become available each year and if it is financially viable for us to change to these products we do so. We also specify eco-friendly criteria in our tenders – for example the packaging on sandwiches and it is due to pressure from buyers at Universities that a lot of improvements have been made.

We aim to start offering more sustainable fish and have sought guidance from the Marine Stewardship Council on how we can best achieve this. We also continue to monitor other sustainability standards such as the feasibility of providing organic milk.

## Locally sourced produce

Locally sourced produce is a complex issue. Much of what we sell or use in our kitchens is locally produced however it is not possible to label everything with this information as availability changes from day to day.

Our fruit and vegetable suppliers source locally whenever possible (obviously some items are only grown abroad) and all fresh meat is British and has **Farm Assured** status.

It should be noted that more than 50% of the University's suppliers are actually within the greater West Midlands postcode area, and the University's expenditure with those suppliers is of the order of 25% of the University's overall annual commercial expenditure. The University tries to positively encourage local suppliers to compete for its business and will continue to identify and create opportunities for local businesses to compete for and secure opportunities to supply the University.

## Catering Disposables

We constantly review methods of reducing the environmental impact of Caterings operations. For example polystyrene cups were replaced with ripple cups several years ago and more eco-friendly products are introduced whenever possible provided that they are fit for purpose and cost effective. Re-usable crockery and cutlery is used in many areas however in some areas this would be impractical.

Clearly disposables have to be used in take-away areas and when this is the case we strive to make them as eco-friendly as possible within the constraints of (practicality, usability, etc.) and budget.

For those who prefer not to use disposables, **Fresh Thinking (http://www.venuebirmingham.com/freshthinking)** offers a crockery option at a small extra charge.

## Pricing

Our food outlets on campus are competitive compared with local cafes and restaurants. In a recent survey our prices were found to be 30% cheaper on average than Selly Oak High Street and 40% cheaper than City Centre prices. Catering is not subsidised so all food and wage costs etc must be included in prices.

It should also be noted that Universities do not have the buying power of supermarkets so cannot demand such low prices as they do.

## Product Choice

Providing catering that everyone likes has to be one of the most challenging things we do. Everyone has different preferences so we can only stock and sell the products that the majority of people choose to eat. Catering consistently reviews the range of food it sells in conjunction with its customers and offers fashionable trends as well as traditional fayre.

## Special Diets

- **Organic:**
  A small number of organic products are now available in catering outlets and the range will continue to be reviewed.
- **Vegan:**
  Vegan meals are available on request however due to low demand they are cooked to order so may take a little longer to prepare. Please ask our staff.

- **Healthy Options:**
  There is a wide range of food offered across campus including low fat, low salt options. Different outlets sell different products and many offer salads, vegetables and choices of protein. However, due to customer demand, items such as chips and burgers are still offered.
- **Other Special Diets:**
  Demand for products such as wheat free and dairy free is low and it is not always feasible to offer them. Products are trialled periodically but people who require a special diet may find it easier to cater for themselves.
- **Allergens:**
  New legislation on allergens will be introduced in December 2014. Catering staff are being trained and allergen information will be made available in all Catering areas

The range of products is kept under review.

## Water Coolers

Water coolers are tendered for (as required by Public Sector Procurement regulations) - there is one approved supplier. The requirement for the supplier to work with the University to increase the proportion of plumbed in coolers (and reduce the number of bottled coolers) formed part of the specification. There has already been some success with this over the contract period.

Water coolers are provided in a number of public areas such as the Library, Sports Centre and University Centre for use by staff, students and visitors.

With regard to the sale of bottled water, this is a very popular line in our catering outlets – it is convenient and portable - and we intend to continue to sell it whilst there is a demand. We appreciate that there is an environmental impact and constantly research the market for more eco-friendly alternatives. Our bottled water supplier makes a contribution to charity for every bottle purchased and several thousand pounds has been donated to **MacMillan Cancer Support (http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Home.aspx)** and **LUCIA Charity (http://www.luciacharity.org.uk/)** through this scheme.

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