

University of Exeter- Grand Challenges: Connecting The Real Food Store with the University of Exeter and its student community

“One of our staff team at Real Food Store is interested in working with you on the specific topic of improving the access of the University of Exeter community itself to good food (like Real Food Store is already doing in the city centre).”

In response to the above brief and following consultation with Richard Davis, executive director at The Real Food Store, we present the following proposals based on analysis conducted as part of the Grand Challenges Project under the lead of Harry G. West, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Exeter:

Proposal 1: Moving towards click-and-collect

Proposal 2: Involvement in Freshers’ Week

Proposal 3: Setting up a stall at the University’s Farmers’ Market

Please see the following pages for further details on our suggestions as to how The Real Food Store could gain access to the University of Exeter student community, both as a source of new demand and in spreading its mission of connecting more people with organic local food.

Proposal 1: Moving towards click-and-collect

Having identified a plateau both in sales and impact for social change in The Real Food Store's current business model we concentrated our market research on finding ways in which the store might bring its produce closer to consumer demand, and specifically that of University of Exeter students. We believe that an e-commerce platform would present both a profitable and viable business avenue for The Real Food Store that would ultimately allow it to reach out to more people and connect them with local produce in line with keeping with its social enterprise mission.

Details:

Our research highlighted a general trend towards online shopping in the UK population as a whole and specifically within the younger generation of shoppers. A survey conducted within the student population indicated that the same trend can be observed at the University of Exeter. Please note that the accuracy of the survey has its limitations as we were only able to encompass a sample of 60 students in our questionnaire due to the unfortunate timing of Grand Challenges week that meant that most students had left campus for the summer holidays. While we would suggest conducting another survey during term time should The Real Food Store be interested in pursuing this venture further, it is clear that our findings underline the general observation that the demand for healthy eating is very strong at the University of Exeter. The Students' Guild (our Students' Union) elections have for many consecutive years now had a focus on the availability of healthy food options for students showing this is a major concern for many studying at the University of Exeter. Most recently the Guild pushed to install the café Pret A Manger and the venture selling organic food has been a great success with students despite offering prices that often exceed those of other University food outlets. Alone in coffees, where there are multiple cheaper alternative vendors on campus and where they can arguably least score on their organic/healthy value proposition, they sell up to 1100 in a day.

The University of Exeter has a student population of approx. 20 000, numbers that are rapidly growing year-on-year shown not least by the number of new student halls being built (most notably on Queen Street itself, just one building away from the new location of the store. Of our sample, most students conducted weekly shops which fits into the e-commerce shopping model.

Our survey showed that 45% of asked students placed importance on the healthiness of their food, with most students choosing to buy their healthy/organically sourced alternatives at supermarket chains. However, when the delivery of healthy produce is offered to halls or campus, i.e. a location that is convenient to them through a medium convenient to them, we see a vast rise in the percentage of students interested in buying healthy food to 80%, that is approximately 18 500 students not taking into account the potential for picking up staff demand increasing the number of students that The Real Food Store can appeal to. We found 40% of students to be interested in home delivery (which we categorised as not a feasible option for the store) but 23% would buy into food deliveries to halls, 16% thought campus to be most convenient for pick-up and 7% were interested in collecting advance food orders in town, more realistic avenues to explore. If these percentages translated all across the University this could mean a starting base of at least 4600 students interested in regularly using a click-and-collect service with collection point campus/centre of town/student halls.

Logistics:

In recognising the limited resources of The Real Food Store we propose to pursue a click-and-collect set-up with collection points at the new Queen Street store itself, a prime road for students walking into town, and a joint collection point on campus in collaboration with the VegShare scheme, an existing student initiative. Given the results of our survey we estimate a minimum base student demand of approximately 3700 regular customers that could be accessed in pursuing an e-commerce targeted at these collection points. While a collection point at the store itself is most easily set-up we believe it is worth also pursuing a collection point on campus for The Real Food store to establish its name in the student community, raising awareness for both organic shopping and the store simultaneously along the incoming revenues from the new business venture. The existing click-and-collect organic produce venture VegShare has declared themselves willing and keen to explore the opportunities for a collaboration. They share a social enterprise ethos and believe a greater scale and the associated greater buzz around the concept of bringing healthy produce to students could benefit both in pursuing the shared vision of connecting more people to local organic food.

The business model Exeter VegShare- an existing successful click-and-collect scheme



OPEN FOOD
NETWORK

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
STUDENTS'
GUILD



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-student-led social enterprise
-run exclusively through volunteers, supported by the University of Exeter Students' Guild Green Unit
- 'Vegbox scheme' since 1st March 2017: strong and growing student and staff demand observed so far

How it works:

They buy Shillingford Organic farm produce in wholesale, pack up the produce into bags ready for pick-up between 1 - 5.30 pm every Wednesday at their collection-point in the RAM foyer, Devonshire House (adjacent to the forum), Streatham Campus.

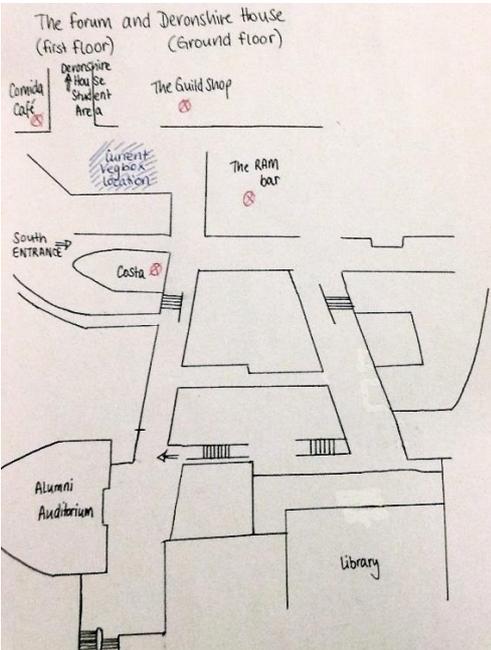
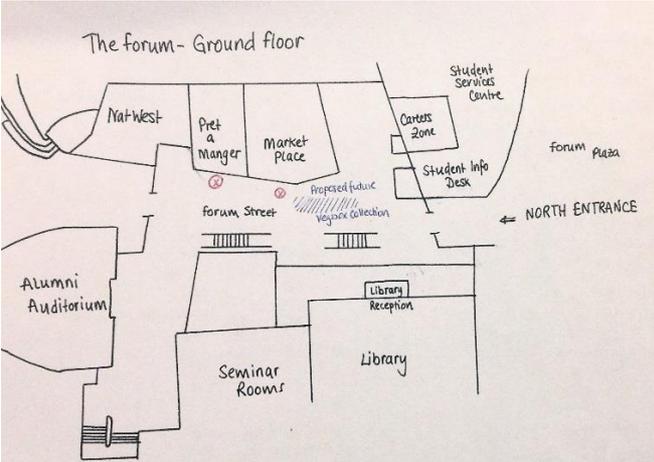
Orders and payments for the next week can be placed at the same stand, or alternatively the enterprise has a profile on the Open Food Network where online orders can be placed up to the Monday before collection Wednesday in combination with collaborating with the University's Green Unit that provides a payment drop-off desk on campus for students' convenience.

Research conducted shows the advantageousness of positioning a campus collection point in proximity to the forum in wanting to provide optimum convenience for students and staff, as well as allowing for the business to simultaneously spread awareness about the store and the lifestyle it stands for.

The forum is visited by 50-60% of students each day during term times. The VegShare current stand is located in the Devonshire House area of the Forum building, directly on the student through-way path to the majority of University food outlets, namely the RAM student bar, Students' Guild shop selling both merchandise and sandwiches, Comida wrap and smoothie bar and The Terrace and Pieminster hot food serving restaurants. To allow for an extrapolation of numbers we have found out that:

- Comida sells 500 wraps on a busy day
- Ram has 200-500 paying customers/day
- GuildShop reports 800-900 students per day

It has to be taken into account that many students bring a packed lunch and thus while they may be walking past that route don't buy anything in these outlets. Thus, access to student population in setting up in this location is likely to far exceed even the highest number of recorded visitors of 900 per day in the Guild Shop.



There is a big trend towards e-commerce in the food sector as a whole, and online shopping is particularly attractive for students for whom it is easier to keep track of their expenditure this way. A collaboration with the existing VegShare venture could provide a feasible access point into this growing market and student demand specifically.

Proposal 2: Involvement in Freshers' Week

It is without doubt that many students newly form their shopping habits when they arrive at university given the new set of budget restrictions placed upon them and the fact that they are often settling in a city new to them which offers a different set of convenient shopping outlets given their accommodation placement to what they might know from home. Largely being the first time students are faced with the challenge of cooking for themselves it is also a time of cooking habit formation, new habits that follow them at least through the duration of completing their University degree at Exeter. Freshers' week lies at the heart of where the yearly incoming student population of 7000 gain first impulses in this matter. But, what would be the best option for the Real Food Store to establish its name and mission of spreading healthy organic local shopping and cooking with students? We have explored the available options:

Pre- Arrival:

A5 flyer insert in the Welcome pack: £700.

One full page in the open booklet provided to students: £250.

One full page in the Fresher's Exposé (Student newspaper): £299.

All Colour.

Freshers' Fair:

Over 7000 students attend.

The Great Hall (4mx2m): £899

Forum Street (3mx2m): £799

The Sanctuary (2mx2m): £729

Outside the Great Hall, Piazza (3mx3m): £699; (5mx5m): £899.

First Week of term: [25th-29th September]

(2mx2m) Indoor stall at Devonshire House: £249.

Up to 2000 leaflets/flyers at the Bottom of Forum hill, with up to 5 staff: £249+VAT

Fresher Bundles:

Bronze (£1375)- Fair: Sanctuary (2mx2m) and A5 flyer insert.

Silver (£1700)- Fair: Forum Street (3mx2m) and both A5 insert and full advert page in the booklet.

Gold (£1800)- Fair: The Great Hall (4mx2m) and A5 flyer insert and full advert page in the booklet.

Fresher's Ball:

Stall at the Ball (3mx3m) – with the option of offering free tasters: £500+VAT

Upon matching up The Real Food Store's requirements and available resources with the options available, we have come to the conclusion to recommend the following two:

- Pre-arrival booklet entry: £250, with an outreach of 7000 freshers
- First week Devonshire House indoor stall (2x2m): £249 for 25-29th September

In addition, we can recommend looking into the following options to make the store more approachable and attractive to both incoming and existing students:

- Incorporating opportunities for customers to try produce sold, e.g. offering spread/cheese/cold meats samples on house bread to increase accessibility, or having fruit/veg samples on a rota to underline the difference organic has on quality of taste and the unique flavour of local produce
- Raising awareness that both the City Library (where cafe is re-locating) and The Real Food Store are on the Guild's list of alternative study place options: untapped potential to explore this avenue for further marketing

Proposal 3: Setting up a stall at the University's Farmers' Market

Our research shows that the retail food market is predicted to become more and more competitive going forward, particularly the healthy conscious end, as the trend of organic eating grows further. We therefore see a need for The Real Food Store to distinguish themselves beyond adapting to new customer demand for e-commerce shopping in keeping up with the competition. We believe that the store could effectively grow its outreach to the community by moving its produce closer to the consumer, also in response to organic farmers, including Shillingford Organic farm increasingly wanting to act as retailers themselves thus undermining the value proposition of The Real Food Store. We propose that The Real Food Store should establish itself as a farm shop style café offering fresh sandwiches made with its existing produce at the regular farmers' market held at the University of Exeter, leaning on Student Volunteers to help realise this project. At limited additional cost, further reduced by introducing student volunteers, this would be an opportunity for the store to showcase the use of its local produce also making them more accessible to students.

What's the Farmers' Market?

- Food and drink from more than 13 local businesses
- Running since 2011
- Located outside Forum and Great Hall
- Every Friday 11:00-15:00 term time, first Friday of the month out of term

Expected costs involved:
Forum Piazza Outdoor Stall (5mx5m): £249+VAT

Exeter Student Volunteers:
Exeter Student Volunteers' is a Students' Guild led initiative which offers students a platform to get involved in the community on a volunteer basis. From the success story of the VegShare scheme, which runs exclusively with volunteers, it is evident that students are interested in volunteering in food and health related causes. Exeter Student Volunteers have already expressed a high level of interest in working with The Real Food Store and have welcome the store to get in touch via email to discuss potential collaboration in the future: esv-president@groups.exeterguild.com

OUR PROPOSAL: Moving The Real Food Store closer to the consumer



University of Exeter Farmers' Market