**Proposal to reinstate the Café Provision at Aspect Court**

Since August 2023, Hallam Students’ Union (HSU), in support of Social Sciences & Arts (SSA) College Officer, Martha Mitchell, has been collaborating with the students and academic staff who regularly attend Aspect Court Building as part of their work or studies. What we have found is a strong call to bring back the Café provision in the building.

The release of the 2023 National Student Survey (NSS) results highlighted a key issue for those with their university “base” building being Aspect Court. BA Professional Policing students, and their Degree Apprenticeship counterparts, all reported low scores for Student Voice satisfaction (averaging 47.6%) and Organisation and Management satisfaction (25.5%). This scoring is not only some of the lowest within Hallam but also some of the lowest in the sector. Following the release of the NSS results, both the University and HSU put together action plans to focus on key departments with some of the lowest scores. The Law & Criminology Department, with a focus on the Policing courses, was the area chosen for SSA.

After speaking with Academic staff (course, department & collegiate level) and gathering feedback from students through our Share Your Experience feedback platform, a feedback box left at Aspect Court, speaking to our Department & Course Reps, Departmental Student Forums & receiving University Pulse survey/focus group results, the resounding issue was clear. A significant part of Policing student dissatisfaction with Hallam is the lack of care the students feel they receive from the wider University structures, largely exacerbated by the removal of Café services at the Aspect Court building.

The majority of feedback from Policing students emphasised the need for hot food in the building. When the café was closed at Aspect court, vending machines were introduced to provide unhealthy snacks to the students based there. Having said this, the most prevalent theme found from the feedback forms was problems with the vending machines. Comments include “facilities are not reliable or adequate” and “they do not work!”. Furthermore, one student commented on the hindering quality of the facilities that are currently on offer, “the hot water machine hardly works even if we bring our own coffee/tea bags”. Students also commented on the cold weather impacting whether they go to get food from external sources, “it’s cold outside and people have to travel to get food”, which they believe would be solved by having a good selection of food on offer in the building. Many comments mentioned the high prices of the food on offer in the vending machines.

HSU conducted three waves of a cost-of-living survey in the 22/23 academic year, with the third wave report produced in June 2023, with key recommendations becoming part of the Student Voice Report (SVR). The SVR is a partnership report between HSU & the University, where we commit to collaborating on key issues for students. Recommendation 7 focused on food provision:

*“In addition to a continuing commitment to targeted food promotions such as £1 Wednesdays, all food outlets across campus should offer at least one affordable, healthy, hot food option, all day, every day.”*

Whilst we understand that Hallam has done a significant amount to support students through the cost-of-living crisis, with big commitments to subsidise affordable food on campus, and supporting us with donations to the HSU Community Fridge, the lack of Café provision at Aspect Court means that Hallam cannot fulfil their side of this recommendation. Based on our conversations with the students, the alternatives including the hot water tap, vending machines & potential for hot food vending machines are not suitable for their needs. The lack of Café facilities at Aspect Court has also posed an accessibility issue, as one student highlighted “I am coeliac and T1 diabetic and often need access to food and most food in the vending machine I cannot have and isn’t suitable when hypo”. Another student noted that “some people can’t make the journey to get food due to illness/issues”.

As well as Policing students, we also have a significant number of other degree apprenticeship courses that use these buildings, with our membership numbers suggesting 1500+ students that have more than two sessions a semester at Aspect Court. This then means that we must consider the implications this has for OFSTED guidance around safeguarding and the wellbeing of our degree apprentices with lack of suitable facilities. Our degree apprentice profiles, particularly the Policing cohort, are heavily made up of commuters traveling long distances, including Cambridge & Manchester. With both disabled students & commuter students being groups that the Office for Students want the sector to consider for Access and Participation barriers, it feels remiss to not consider how these issues could impact their studies & experience at Hallam.

Considering the above, HSU is asking that the University bring back the Café provision at Aspect Court. Whilst we understand the financial pressures that the University is under, we believe that the lack of current provision will hurt Hallam in the future when it comes to recruitment & retention rates, which will be exacerbated by a continuing poor NSS score for these courses as well as implications with the Access and Participation plan work. We have actively taken on feedback from students and had many productive meetings with teaching and collegiate staff around the current need, but we haven’t seen any movement from Campus Services on this issue.

We’d propose that the Café structure should be brought back, with two catering staff members keeping it open 10 am-2 pm on weekdays, providing oversight of an offer like Cafes such as Charles Street, with sandwiches, paninis, coffee machines. We’d encourage this action as soon as possible given the impact on students and staff affected.