

Reducing Childhood Obesity: Food Innovation Consultancy Challenge

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Citation:

BENSON, Michael (2019). Reducing Childhood Obesity: Food Innovation Consultancy Challenge. In: 2019 PHE Conference, Warwick University, 10-11 Sep 2019. Public Health England. [Conference or Workshop Item]

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Sheffield Hallam University

Reducing Childhood Obesity: Food Innovation Consultancy Challenge

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Introduction

Reducing obesity, in particular childhood obesity is the fundamental aim of this new and innovative final year undergraduate module at Sheffield Business School (SBS). 80 x BSc (Hons) Food Marketing Management and BSc (Hons) Food & Nutrition students undertook this real live challenge, known as the Food Innovation Consultancy Challenge (FICC). SBS 'live' offers real-life consultancy, placement and opportunities for students to work abroad. It develops student confidence and resilience and creates knowledge that provides practical solutions to real world challenges. The FICC module is a 40 credit final year module designed to support SBS 'live' and aims to provide students with an opportunity to improve their professional skills through traditional academic learning, but also through engaging with a current real life challenge. Ovenden-Hope and Blandford (2018) state 'applied learning' sets learning within practical situations to improve the learner's understanding of how theory works in practice. This module is designed to allow learner's to understand professional development and CPD theory from personal reflection, action planning and using the experience from real-life learning of a topical issue within the industry sector. FICC is tailored to Food Marketing Management and Food & Nutrition students, but it is a model that can be easily adapted to any subject group across a university.

Students take on the role of professional consultants who received a brief from the client. Sheffield Business School were have been appointed by the client Asda Stores plc (Asda, 2019) to investigate sugar reduction across a range of Asda Brand (own-label) biscuits. The student consultants worked on sugar reduction in Asda bourbons, Asda custard creams and Asda milk chocolate digestives. The client advised that the consultancy challenge is in response to the Government directive to reduce sugar in food and drink within the UK by 20% by 2020 (Gov.uk, 2018; PHE, 2017 (a), (b), (c), 2018 (a), (b). In August 2016, Government through Public Health England out its approach to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity in 'Childhood obesity: a plan for action' (NHS, 2019; Gov.uk, 2018; PHE, 2017(a), (b), (c), 2018 (a), (b). A key commitment in the plan was to launch a broad, structured sugar reduction programme to remove sugar from everyday products (Skafida & Chambers, 2018; Briggs et al., 2017; Cooper, 2017). This can be achieved through reducing sugar levels in products, reducing portion size, or shifting purchasing towards lower sugar alternatives. Sugarwise (2019), the international authority for sugar related claims who certify products to the World Health Organisation WHO (2018; 2015) guidelines became involved in the challenge, and agreed to support the client to achieve the Sugarwise marque. Sugarwise are the only international certification body for sugar related claims, for example sugar free, low sugar, no added sugar, reduced sugar, low calorie, calorie free and reduced carb and have more than 500 products certified across 70 countries. The Government are currently considering using the Sugarwise marque as the industry benchmark for sugar claims, and as result of this challenge students will attend the Sugar Summit in Parliament in September 2019.

Aims & Objectives

Module Learning Outcomes:

1. Research, interpret and evaluate information from a variety of business sources, for example marketing, commercial, technical etc. in order to frame the consultancy problem and propose a plan of action. 2. Present effectively and professionally the solutions and recommendations against the brief, to the industry partner (client) and academic tutors.

3. Use information gained through reflective practice, work experience and elsewhere to inform your future career planning to improve your employability and career potential, drawing upon concepts and frameworks in career management and personal development theory.

Client Objectives (Asda Stores plc):

1. 20% reduction in sugar across focus categories set by Public Health England and legislative bodies, in order to be in line with the 2020 Government Sugar Reduction Strategy.

2. Explore the reasons and benefits of sugar reduction in line with the Government 2020 strategy and as consultant teams develop a tactical initiative to be implemented by the client to help deliver the strategy. 3. Identify and if appropriate recommend the student consultant to apply for a position on the Asda Graduate programme.

Method: The Big 7

The students followed the seven steps of the module (known as the Big 7) to ensure each group maintained a consistent approach. The first step was to carry out primary research involving a gap analysis of the UK biscuit market including reviewing the existing biscuit ranges of mainstream, premium and discounter UK retailers. They carried out a detailed gap analysis of the targeted range of biscuits within the challenge: bourbon creams, custarc creams and milk chocolate digestives. Students analysed the findings to provide potential gaps in the market and advise the client whether or not to introduce or discontinue biscuit products from their ranges. They also carried out further primary research by interviewing / focus groups of consumers to find out their views on sugar reduction and future biscuit needs. This included new methods of social media research including using Facebook and Instagram for instant feedback. Students then carried out secondary research using databases held at Sheffield Hallam University and with the client. This included using 'live' data from the university library including Kantar Worldpanel data and Shopper Intelligence and Institute of Grocery Distribution (Kantar, 2019; Shopper Intelligence, 2019, IGD, 2019). Students supported industry data with traditional academic research including retailing journals, books and publications. Students analysed the primary and secondary data, calculated the necessary commercials to provide a solution to the client. This process is exactly the same activity as they would follow in a real world situation.

The final step of the Big 7 was the deliverable. All student teams presented a **1,000 word poster and deliverable** to the academic marking team and the Asda judging panel. The academic team marked the presentations against the marking grid criteria and provided a summative degree mark and feedback. The Asda team also provided additional formative feedback from an industry perspective. Food and Nutrition students deliverable was the new 'less sugar' biscuit and Food Marketing Management students deliverable was the marketing communication of a 'less sugar' biscuit range of biscuits by designing a new biscuit merchandising brief and building this on the fixture at the clients premises.

The group presentations and deliverables were exhibited at the end of the module at the Merchandising Centre of **Excellence (MCE) in Asda House**. The Asda team also used the challenge to identify future talent to enter their business, and two students were successful. Working with a UK blue-chip company gave students the best possible opportunity to gain experience, improve confidence and start building lifelong networks. Asda ambassadors regularly communicated with the students by delivering practical sessions, email contact and speed dating. The speed dating is an open discussion session where Asda colleagues from every area of their business are available to answer student questions. Asda also made their internal data available for the students.

Students worked in 'state of the art' facilities provided by SBS; the Business Advice Centre (BAC) and the 12th floor kitchens a £3m food development facility. The Insights Discovery profile provided students with their strengths and weaknesses and they used the challenge to improve these and help get them 'career ready' (IFST, 2016). This was documented on a portable Pebble Pad portfolio for use at future interviews and to support CPD.



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