

Food for thought

We take a look at the University of Lincoln's satellite campus in Holbeach

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
FOOD MANUFACTURING

Lincolnshire is well-known for its contribution to the nation's gastronomic repertoire through such delights as the Lincolnshire sausage, but its importance 'behind the scenes' in the continued success of the nation's food industry is perhaps less widely known.

Strategically situated in South Lincolnshire, Holbeach hosts the University of Lincoln's specialist campus for the food manufacturing sector. It is rapidly gaining recognition as a key driver of training, research and product development – all essential to ensure the success of the UK in a highly competitive sector.

The campus, on the Holbeach Technology Park, serves the UK's largest concentration of food manufacturing businesses located in the East Midlands and Eastern regions. Food manufacturing is worth £2.5 billion to the economy of South Lincolnshire each year.

Redeveloped in 2004, the Holbeach campus has grown from its roots as a vocational training centre into an internationally-recognised provider of undergraduate and post-graduate education, research and technical business support for the food industry, as well as continuing to

expand vocational, practical-focused, courses.

Driven by the needs of businesses in the food manufacturing sector, the second phase of Holbeach's development was completed in March 2009 with the creation of a £3.5m flagship specialist education, training and research facility built to food factory specification, the National Centre for Food

Manufacturing. Sir Stuart Rose, the then Chief

Executive of Marks and Spencer, officially opened the Centre in March 2009 in the presence of partners and students.

The National Centre is backed by the employers' organisation the Process and Packaging Machinery Association (PPMA).

It is co-funded by employers, PPMA members, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Enterprise and the East Midlands Development Agency (emda).

The facility is fitted with state-of-the-art food manufacturing equipment,

much of it sponsored by PPMA member Ishida Europe, which includes automated fresh food weighing and packaging lines with robotic case packing. Also at the Centre are microbiology and analytical labs, a test kitchen and sensory suite – which has been featured on the BBC's Countryfile programme.



UNIVERSITY OF
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THE ISHIDA LINE



PROCESS SCREEN CLOSE UP

All this enables trainees to put their learning into practice in a factory environment, making them fully up to speed with the technology before applying it in a real production run. It also assists machinery manufacturers by giving them the opportunity to install, test out and then demonstrate their latest products to companies in the food sector.

The well-qualified and committed team at Holbeach has worked at all levels in the food industry and the teaching programmes are informed by the close association between the campus and local companies – from large multinationals to small niche market producers. Many of the courses provided at Holbeach are delivered on site at students' places of employment. This level of responsiveness to the needs of businesses is at the heart of the Centre's success.

Professor Val Braybrooks, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Animal Sciences, who herself received an MBE this year for services to education and the food industry, said: "What is innovative about Holbeach is that the provision has been shaped and dictated by the employers whose businesses the campus supports. This partnership has created arguably the best resource of its kind in the UK. It will be a valuable asset in ensuring the sector's future in a highly competitive global market."

By engaging its people and resources in partnership with local companies, the Centre encourages innovation and knowledge transfer through undertaking technical projects tackling some of the challenges facing the food industry today. These projects include new product development and food testing.

Courses, which range from post-graduate, to a degree in Food Science and Manufacture to specialist short courses accredited by professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, are taught by academic staff with experience in senior positions in industry. In addition to skills training, the area is involved in technical consultancy and research, working within Lincoln and collaborative partnerships with other leading Universities.

Around 2,000 staff from 200 different employers study at Holbeach each year. They include employees of major international companies such as Moy Park, Tulip, Bakkavör, Premier Foods and the Produce World Group, many of whom supply the country's leading supermarket chains. And, thanks to many of the courses being available through distance learning, the Centre has students from as far away as Cornwall benefitting from the expertise of its staff.

Perhaps, then, even the Cornish pasty has Lincolnshire to thank for its continued success.