



Cleaner, brighter, safer car parks

Parking helps top university remain competitive



The University Of Sheffield.

Managing multiple small-scale inner city car parks is a challenge for any operator. The University of Sheffield succeeds with a Park Mark-inspired investment programme that has improved availability, security, cleanliness and fear of crime.

Reputation is key for the research university. It is one of the original red brick universities in the United Kingdom, a member of the Russell Group and received a royal charter in 1905.

In 2014 the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey ranked the university first for student experience,

social life, university facilities and accommodation. A separate 2014 survey, the QS World University Rankings, placed Sheffield 12th overall in the UK and 69th globally.

High quality parking for students, staff and visitors is part of the service that keeps the university competitive. It has 100 car parks ranging in size from one space up to 300 spaces; with 2,000 spaces in total. Most are small; just 21 have more than 20 spaces. The university has been proactively managing its car parks since 1997 and joined the Safer Parking Scheme in 2011 when Travel Planner Darren Hardwick took over responsibility for parking management.

“Park Mark and the Safer Parking Scheme are a part of the overall service we provide,” he said. “It is a quality standard that shows we take seriously everything we

do and adds to the positive experience our students receive.”



Good service is essential

West of Sheffield centre is the main campus, a mile-long ribbon where most of the buildings belong to the university. There are another three campuses, including halls of residence, further out in the east and west.



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Back in 1997 almost two-thirds of staff were driving into work and parking in neighbouring streets if they couldn't find a university space. Roll forward to 2014 and, with 7,000 staff and 30,000 students, the problems would be compounded if the university was not proactively managing driving and parking.

"Now only 22 per cent of staff drive to work. We promote cycling, car sharing and public transport and manage our limited car spaces by charging and restricting who is eligible for parking permits," said Hardwick. "We have to give a good service as we are charging staff, otherwise we would get lots of dissatisfaction and complaints."

Staff members can choose from a range of parking permits with different tariffs. The cheapest does not guarantee a specific space, instead giving the holder a wide variety to choose from.

Although the university did not have an issue with crime in its car parks in 2011, drivers were not comfortable using some car parks after dark, especially those without lighting and in more peripheral locations. This perception mattered as the university opens its theatres, music venues, bars and conference facilities in the evenings and at weekends.



Useful advice

The university was already a member of the British Parking Association when Hardwick took over responsibility for parking. He quickly applied to have the university's 20 largest car parks assessed under the Safer Parking Scheme.

Twelve passed the initial assessment and were awarded the Park Mark. A rolling programme of improvements in the following three years saw the other eight also join the scheme and has been a key consideration as the university develops a new multi storey car park.

"During the initial assessment we had some very useful advice. Some were simple things; others were more complex. It was good to have an independent assessment, a different pair of eyes, looking at what we do."



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Smaller things included tidying up vegetation to improve sightlines across car parks, removing graffiti, speeding up scheduled maintenance, changing to energy efficient lighting with motion sensors and painting ceilings white to improve brightness.

Other changes required more financial investment. One car park needed planning permission for new perimeter fencing, CCTV and lighting as it is in a residential area.

Darren and the team of eight campus wardens find accreditation a quick process, even though some of the car parks are a distance from each other. "From the time I first expressed interest to the first actual assessment was quick and assessing the 20 car parks took a day. All 20 have now reached the Park Mark standard.

"We've just done a big signage audit to ensure all our accredited car parks have signs with the Park Mark tick and logo on them. We're proud of what we have done."



Ongoing investment

For Darren and his team the Safer Parking Scheme and its Park Mark award have been a helpful way of securing additional investment for their ongoing programme to improve parking at the university. They

are able to prove they have attained an international quality standard as a result of improving lighting, security, cleanliness and management processes.

Campus wardens are now better at spotting issues since spending time with the police assessor and BPA area manager during biennial assessments. Their role is to patrol car parks checking permits, graffiti, signage and encouraging drivers not to do anything that might encourage criminals and vandalism.

During a recent assessment wardens realised a homeless person was living in trees at the back of one car park. They helped the man and also made improvements to the car park so it is not possible to live there anymore.

"Most of our spaces are in the city centre, if we didn't manage them proactively we would be taken advantage of," said



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Hardwick. "Permit holders are the majority of our users. We are tough when they block fire exits, park in disabled spaces, or block other people in. However, we are here to provide a service for staff and students, not to catch them out."

Investment is noticeable to users. Litter, graffiti and fear of crime are no longer issues. Parking spaces are better managed, wardens provide on-site security 24/7, CCTV coverage is now comprehensive and planned ongoing maintenance ensures quality of service remains high.

More information:

<http://www.britishparking.co.uk/Initiatives/Park-Mark>

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/>