

Nottingham University negotiates changes in reward system with the academic union



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Nottingham University has established a reputation for academic excellence placing it firmly among the top universities in the country. So preserving that reputation while implementing necessary changes in the grading and reward structure of academic staff was a delicate process calling for skilled negotiation.

Richard Lee, Human Resources Director at the University recognised the need to work in partnership with the Academic Union to gain agreement to the changes if they were to be implemented successfully. Some of the issues to be discussed were very different to the ones encountered in the past, with the increased risk of conflict, so there was a need to plan for the negotiations with care. He decided to bring in external expertise to help with this planning process, to assign priorities to the issues under discussion and ensure that all

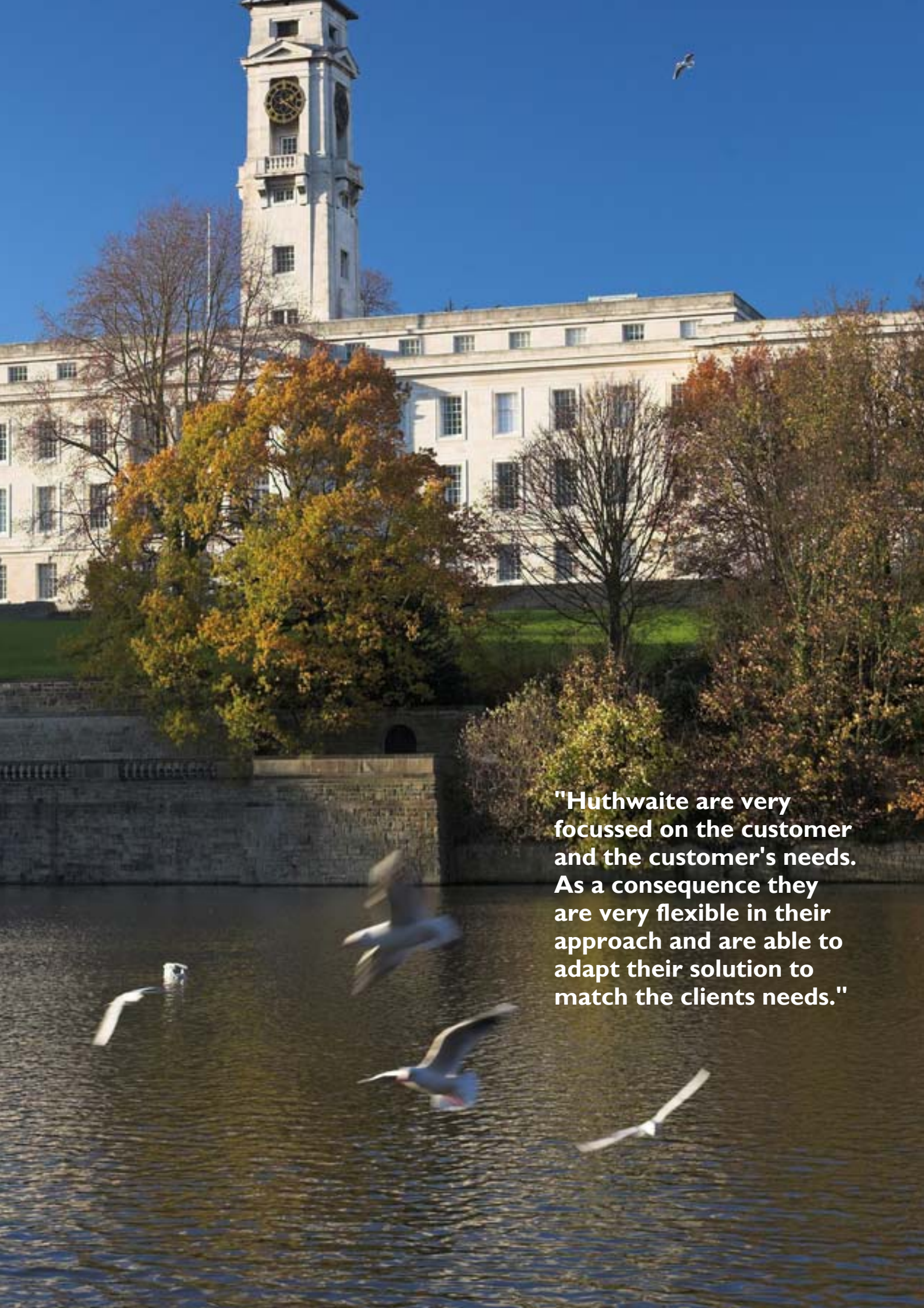
the options for dealing with those issues were explored. The team held a planning workshop to set priorities.

Ian Newall and Linda Marsh of Huthwaite conducted a workshop with the negotiating team, helping them to prepare for the coming negotiation. Ian Newall commented on the event: "This was quite an unusual situation for us. We have been involved in industrial relations negotiations before and I have experience of the academic world, but it's not often we get involved in negotiations of this type. It was important for the University to make the changes but at the same time they needed to keep everyone on board. I think we helped the team to set priorities and identify areas where movement was possible."

By working with Huthwaite, the University team was able to generate some creative options to help the two sides to move closer to a win-win outcome. They also

exercised great care in the process of getting to agreement, allowing enough time for negotiation meetings as well as the mandating process by which both sides had to keep their respective constituencies involved and informed.

Asked to comment on the help provided by Huthwaite, Richard Lee commented, "There are three things I particularly like about Huthwaite. First they are very focussed on the customer and the customer's needs. As a consequence they are very flexible in their approach and are able to adapt their solution to match the clients needs. Finally, they provided experienced people, who understood our situation and were able to help us identify and plan the key issues quickly. As a result of the planning session the agreement has been successfully negotiated and is now entering the implementation phase."



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