STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Policy Briefing – Plant Based UCL Campaign

Welfare & Community Zone, February 2022

What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

The SU's café outlets[1] (George Farha Café, Gordon's Café, Print Room Café, Bloomsbury Café, and Stone Willy's) currently offer vegan and vegetarian options alongside other non-plant-based options. The only SU bar that serves meals is the Institute Bar, which offers pizzas with optional meat and/or vegetable toppings. The other SU bars (The Huntley, Mully's Basement, and Phineas) do not serve food besides crips and nuts. In 2019, the SU ran a campaign to make UCL 50% Vegan by 2020.[2]

UCL has a healthy and sustainable food policy[3] which includes ensuring 50% of food offers provided are vegetarian or vegan and listing these options above meat-based meals on menus. This policy also includes goals to ensure meat is Red Tractor approved, dairy is certified organic and vegan milk options are offered at the same price as cow's milk, eggs are free range, and fish is Marine Stewardship Council certified or on the Marine Conservation Society Good Fish Guide. UCL has also launched the Powered by Plants[4] initiative to provide 100% vegetarian catering at department events and meetings as default. PETA has named UCL one of the most vegan friendly universities in the U.K.[5]

What is the relevant national/ international context to this situation?

Research led by UCL has found that the food system is responsible for 20-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions, most of which originate from meat and dairy livestock. Excessive consumption of red meat is also linked to poor health outcomes, including premature death.[6] The policy proposal cited a study by Poore and Nemecek (2018),[7] which found that animal products have greater environmental impact than vegetable substitutes. The UN has also said that reducing meat consumption and switching to a plant-based diet can help fight climate change.[8] However, the BBC points out that "the vegan diet is not always green," and plant-based food may contribute to other environmental concerns such as intensive water usage and deforestation.[9]

Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

No.

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[1] https://studentsunionucl.org/eat-drink-shop#

[2] https://studentsunionucl.org/articles/50by2020-make-ucl-50-vegan-by-2020

[3] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable/positive-climate/sustainable-food

[4] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable/positive-climate/sustainable-food/ucl-powered-plants#:~:text=The%20UCL%20community%20has%20launched,provided%20by%20plant%2Dbased%20diets.&text=They%20felt%20this%20would%20enhance,face%20of%20the%20Climate%20Emergency.

[5] https://www.peta.org.uk/living/vegan-universities-uk/

[6] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S014067362032290X?via%3Dihub

[7] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325532198_Reducing_food's_environmental_impacts_through_producers_and_consumers/link/5dde940ca6fdcc2837f02458/download

[8] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-49238749

[9] https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200211-why-the-vegan-diet-is-not-always-green

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

No.

Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder/ public relations issues with this policy proposal?

Yes, the SU would need to consider the financial implications of switching to an entirely plant-based menu including, but not limited to, existing supplier contracts, demand for plant-based options on campus, and costs to switch food offerings.

What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

The Union would need to determine which options on campus are already vegan/vegetarian and which options are not plant-based and would need to be replaced. The Union would then need to work with current catering suppliers to determine if all items could be made plant-based, or if relationships with new suppliers need to be established. The Union would need to update menus and signage in all cafes and food outlets and communicate this change to the campus/student body.

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