

Title of the Proposal/Item for Discussion

Plant-based catering at Students' Union UCL

What would you like the Union to do?

- For the Students' Union UCL to endorse the Plant Based Universities Campaign to support student campaigning, and lobby internally, for university-wide, 100% plant-based, and affordable food at UCL.
- For catering outlets owned by the Students' Union to go 60% plant-based by the 2024-2025 academic year, with a 10% annual increase conditional on a positive financial and social yearly review.¹
- For the Students' Union – with assistance from Plant Based Universities – to explain the reasoning behind this policy change to the student population through an educational campaign (perhaps via the Welfare and Community Officer email newsletter), emphasising sustainability and cultural inclusivity.
- For the Students' Union to pressure UCL to do the same.

The 10% annual increase will only continue as far as it remains just and sustainable. This means that every year, all those who wish to contribute their perspective on the transition, based on their experiences of the previous year, will be able to do so. And if the consensus is to cap plant based catering at 75%, then so be it.

We are not asking for individual dietary change. Students can of course bring whatever they wish onto campus and there will still be animal-derived options on campus over the coming years. What we are asking for is institutional divestment. According to this growing [body of scientific literature](#), the transition towards a plant-based food system is essential for the security of our livelihoods and resources. The roadmap for this transition could manifest in incremental shifts such as rolling out default plant milk across campus, meat-free Mondays, and more fully plant-based procurement partnerships.

We ask the Students' Union to transition all of the catering facilities over which it has jurisdiction (Bloomsbury Cafe, George Farha Cafe, Gordon's Cafe, Print Room Cafe, Stone Willy's Pizza, Institute Bar and Kitchen, The Huntley, Phineas and Mully's) to make 60% of food offerings plant-based by the 2024-2025 academic year, with a 10% annual increase conditional on a positive financial and social yearly review.

In the face of the ongoing climate and ecological crisis, transitioning to a just and sustainable plant-based food system is the next logical and necessary step if the Union is truly committed to putting "planet over profit".

¹ This change must occur in main meals, particularly, but not limited to, sandwiches, wraps, packed hot and cold lunches, cooked breakfast and lunches and pizzas.

Our campaign is already endorsed by over 300 students through petition signatures and is supported by many UCL staff members including Dr Matteo Agostini and Professor Mark Maslin, showcasing greater democratic legitimacy to pass this proposal.

Here is our plan for operational viability:

Once the campaign is passed by the Students' Union, we will work with both the Forward Food programme and Plant Based Health Professionals to facilitate menu changes, calculate greenhouse gas emissions from menus and provide culinary workshops to equip chefs with the desire, knowledge and skills to deliver tasty plant-based food (in person, virtually and in a blended format). The Forward Food Program has had a successful trial at the University of Winchester.

The work with Plant Based Health Professionals will provide education on whole-food plant-based nutrition through the creation of an equitable, affordable and nutritious menu that promotes student health and wellbeing.

Step 1: The Forward Food programme calculates greenhouse gas emissions of the current menu in all Students' Union outlets.

Step 2: Plant Based Health Professionals menu alterations are made, ensuring that the new menu is both nutritious and allergy-friendly.

Step 3: Re-training of chefs conducted by the Forward Food Programme.

Step 4: Greenhouse gas emissions of the new plant-based menu are compared with the previous menu.

Throughout this process, we would love to work with the Media and Communications team at the Students' Union to assist in efficiently communicating the Students' Union's decision to transition to a just and sustainable plant-based food catering system.

Why would you like to do this?

Universities are an integral site for this change to occur because they have massive social influence and educate the leaders of our future. They are the sites where much of our research and understanding of the climate crisis emerges. Some of the most compelling research recommending a plant-based food system is coming from our universities, including the University of Oxford². We now have the opportunity to set an example for governments to act in the face of the climate and cost of living crisis.

Agriculture plays a leading role in causing the climate crisis, but is also a key part of the solution. Food production accounts for 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions; and agriculture uses 50% of the world's habitable land, is responsible for 70% of global freshwater

²<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aag0216>

withdrawals, and causes 78% of global ocean and freshwater pollution³. Should we transition to plant-based farming, the UK could free up 51% of its land for rewilding and carbon drawdown. Compared to the production of plant-based foods, animal agriculture (including meat, fish, dairy and eggs) has a disproportionately harmful effect on the environment: despite providing only 37% of humans' protein supply globally and 18% of our calories, animal agriculture is responsible for 57% of food's greenhouse gas emissions⁴ and 32% of *all* anthropogenic methane emissions, with methane being tens of times more powerful than carbon dioxide at warming the atmosphere⁵. Since 2018, academics have found that emissions from the current global food system alone would make it impossible to limit global warming to the 1.5°C target set at the 2015 Paris Agreement⁶, that shifts towards global plant-based diets could sequester enough carbon dioxide to have a 66% chance of limiting warming to the 1.5°C target⁷, and that eating a plant-based diet is probably the single biggest way to reduce one's impact on planet Earth⁸.

Plant based food follows the teachings of all major world religions: it is both halal and kosher and aligned with the values of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Therefore this change will make the SU's catering more accessible to students of all faiths. We are also acutely aware of the cost of living crisis which students are currently facing: a report carried out by the Students' Union UCL found "1 in 4 students regularly go without food or necessities because they cannot afford them" ⁹. The transition to plant based catering is an opportunity to intervene and help students by providing nutritious and affordable meals on campus as plant based foods have been shown to have the least cost per person per day in high-income countries like the UK in analysis by researchers from the University of Oxford¹⁰. Therefore this transition to plant based catering will have three key outcomes: to make UCL campus inclusive to people of all faiths, to help students manage the cost of living crisis, and be part of developing sustainable food systems which nourish people and the planet.

We will know that our motion is a success so far as the 10% annual increase continues based on a yearly financial and social review. This review will be undertaken by the sabbatical officer in charge of the policy once the policy passes, as well as the Head of Commercial Operations. If the review is negative and students are being detrimentally impacted by serving plant-based food on campus, then the increase will not continue. Furthermore, we are not asking for individual dietary change. The climate and cost of living crises are inextricably linked to a government that has failed to plan for and mitigate disaster. And we have the opportunity to do

³<https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food?insight=food-plays-a-large-role-in-many-environmental-impacts#key-insights-on-the-environmental-impacts-of-food>

⁴<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00358-x>

⁵<https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food?insight=food-plays-a-large-role-in-many-environmental-impacts#key-insights-on-the-environmental-impacts-of-food>

⁶<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aba7357>

⁷<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-00603-4>

⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth>

⁹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63f4ed73056f42572785c28e/t/640b4a3d20fc6122160c275e/1678461513650/Cost+of+Living+Report+-+March+2023.pdf>

¹⁰[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00251-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00251-5/fulltext)

better. This is a preventable problem, and 60% plant-based catering is a great step in the right direction, which can be practically and easily inclusive of everyone.

This motion is an opportunity to show students that, in an era of climate anxiety, young people *can* actively help to create a more sustainable future for themselves and their community. The Student's Union is responsible for setting an example. Its principles and actions can inspire students to think critically and act more in alignment with their values on environmental justice.

There is significant precedence for this type of motion: the University of Birmingham and Queen Mary University of London passed the same policy motions earlier in the year. Additionally, the University of Stirling and the University of Cambridge both passed policy motions to go 100% plant-based. However, recognising the financial impact and the diverse student community at UCL, we are simply asking for a 60% plant-based catering after which a 10% annual increase would be dependent on a positive social and financial review.

How will this affect students?

The Plant Based Universities campaign has free and professional support from [Forward Food](#) and [Plant Based Health Professionals](#). They offer training to catering staff, menu design consultancy, and climate footprint calculations of menus for free. The Plant Based Universities campaign is also affiliated with cooking organizations such as BOSH! and Heura, who can provide cooking demonstrations on campus for students to attend, engaging them in the potential vibrancy and affordability of plant-based cuisine. Plant Based Universities will also support the Students' Union in explaining the policy change through an education campaign that emphasises sustainability and cultural inclusivity. We want students to be at the heart of this transition. Not only in campaigning for it, but also in the myriad benefits of affordable, accessible, nutritious and tasty plant-based foods.

Many of the 300 students who have endorsed our campaign do not eat wholly plant-based diets, but still support this campaign as they believe that institutional complicity in the environmentally disastrous meat, dairy and fishing industries must end. This will also allow students the opportunity to make healthier and more sustainable choices.

We choose to work collaboratively with the Students' Union because we see value in pooling our resources together to create a just and sustainable plant-based catering system. From the outline above, it is clear that shifting to more plant-based catering is not only feasible but also necessary, and we know that if we work together as a team we can achieve our goals. We strongly look forward to working with the rest of the members of the Students' Union to bring about this necessary change. Irrespective of which sabbatical officer is allocated to lead this campaign once it is passed, we are happy to work collaboratively with any sabbatical officer and see value in working as a team.