

Policy Proposer(s): Plant-Based University of Manchester

Context

Please detail a description of your proposal, including the topic, any work done on this already, and reasons for raising it in Union Assembly.

A transition to plant-based catering at Students' Union outlets (Corridor Coffee, the Deli, Bar 532, Academy bars and events) in response to the climate crisis.

As students of the University of Manchester, we share the dedication to environmental and social sustainability. This policy therefore aligns with the Students' Union's sustainability goals¹ and commitments to improving access to food during this cost-of-living crisis.² In light of this, we are writing to highlight the continued and growing presence of the Plant-Based Universities campaign here at the University of Manchester.

Plant-Based Universities is a student-led campaign with 22 plant-based commitments and 76 active campaigns internationally.³ We want the Students' Union to act on the climate emergency by transitioning to 50% plant-based catering by 2026 and 100% plant-based catering by 2030 (inclusive of Corridor Coffee, the Deli, Bar 532, Academy bars and events) and lobbying the university to follow suit. We are asking our influential institutions to listen to the growing body of scientific research highlighting the necessity of transitioning towards a just and sustainable plant-based food system.

If we transition to a plant-based food system, we can free up 76% of global farmland, the size of Australia, Europe, the United States and China combined.⁴ We can then re-wild this land, increasing biodiversity and carbon capture.⁵ A recent study showed a potential 75% reduction in emissions from a transition to a plant-based diet,⁶ and research from Oxford University highlights the high environmental cost of animal products, particularly beef, compared to plant-based foods.⁷ Additionally, global demand for animal products contributes to collapsing fish stocks and damages ecosystems.⁸ Over a billion animals are confined in factory farms every year – that's 85% of all UK farmed animals⁹, and over eight in ten Europeans believe that the welfare of farmed animals in their country should be better protected than it is now.¹⁰

Transitioning to plant-based catering aligns with the University of Manchester's sustainability goals and accelerates progress towards becoming net zero by 2050.¹¹ We are not demanding a ban on animal products on campus, but rather that our Students' Union and university divest from these industries at their outlets, just as they have fossil fuels.¹² Becoming plant-based will limit the Students' Union's contribution to the climate and ecological emergency and set an example for the government to genuinely act on the climate crisis.

Moreover, the climate crisis harms the well-being of students, causing heatwaves, wildfires, droughts and more. Vulnerable students, such as those belonging to refugee or disabled communities, are at greater risk from the impacts of the climate crisis, due to systemic inequalities, such as limited access to safe housing, finances and healthcare, which reduces their ability to recover from disasters.¹³ A plant-based transition enhances the Students' Union's duty of care and will benefit the present lives and futures of our community.

1. Please see our expanded policy motion, which has more information:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WHCnWljiV0kYxz5Ify4Cu33WtBCrGZr_0ZCmAcirU/edit?usp=sharing

Benefit For Students

Please outline the positive impact you view this policy having on the student body. This must be in relation to student welfare and/or educational benefit.

Disability Inclusion

- We would consult the Disabled Students' Society in every decision. Catering outlets currently do not extend solidarity to those with textural or digestive needs, or even engage in research to deliver food justice overall.
- This policy has the potential to open a wide range of conversations, enabling students to advocate for what they need in a university menu.

Health

- Plant-based foods help to reduce the risk of cancer and type 2 diabetes, prompting advice from Harvard Medical School to prioritise plant-based protein.^{[14](#)}
- Zoonotic transmission, historically linked to animal agriculture^{[15](#)}, raises concerns about future pandemics, emphasising the importance of transitioning away from animal-based diets.

General Equity

- Plant-based options would increase accessibility for students, staff and visitors following religious requirements such as Halal and Kosher, as well as catering to vegans, vegetarians, and flexitarians.
- More resources could be directed towards minimising other dietary exclusions, such as gluten and soy-free options.
- Plant-based foods are typically more affordable and resilient to price fluctuations^{[16](#)}, making them more accessible to students struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis.

This approach supports Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion values and ensures compliance with legal obligations regarding protected beliefs.^{[17](#)}

Actions & Outcomes

The first part of this section allows you to lay out the short/medium and long term outcomes you would like to see happen in relation to this policy. Secondly, you can outline the actions you wish for the Union to take in accordance with achieving the outcomes (Max 500 words)

Short Term:

- Regularly consult the Disabled Students' Society to ensure concerns can be shared.
- Share a survey and offer meetings for people to express any concerns. Host a meeting with different protected groups and catering to discuss what is needed when changing the current menu.

- Maintain a dialogue with the Students' Union as we create a strong financial plan.

(The SU will continue communications leading up to menu changes.)

Long term:

- The Plant-Based Universities team would be a partner in the transition and will meet with the Students' Union to monitor progress
- Data is gathered on the sales of foods to ensure financial sustainability
- A full transition to plant-based catering by 2030, subject to financial review and student demand, as determined by a checkpoint-based framework.
- The Students' Union lobbies the university to transition to plant-based catering.

We suggest the first changes made to the menu are to make plant-based options the default e.g. oat milk instead of cow's milk, and to put plant-based options at the top of menus, just as the University of Birmingham has done:



Additional Information & Referencing

Please reference any sources of evidence or influence for your policy proposal here.

Resources & Links:

1. Manchesterstudentsunion.com. (2024). *Strategy Website*. [online] Available at: <http://manchesterstudentsunion.com/strategy> [Accessed 16 Oct. 2025].
2. Manchesterstudentsunion.com. (2025). *University of Manchester Students' Union*. [online] Available at: <https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/cost-of-living>.
3. Plantbaseduniversities.org. (2025). *Plant-Based Universities*. [online] Available at: <https://plantbaseduniversities.org/> [Accessed 21 Aug. 2025].

4. University Of Oxford (2018). New estimates of the environmental cost of food | University of Oxford. [online] www.ox.ac.uk. Available at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-06-01-new-estimates-environmental-cost-food>
5. Sun, Z., Scherer, L., Tukker, A., Spawn-Lee, S.A., Bruckner, M., Gibbs, H.K. and Behrens, P. (2022). Dietary change in high-income nations alone can lead to substantial double climate dividend. *Nature Food*, [online] 3, pp.1–9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00431-5>
6. Scarborough, P., Clark, M., Cobiac, L., Papier, K., Knuppel, A., Lynch, J., Harrington, R., Key, T. and Springmann, M. (2023). Vegans, vegetarians, fish-eaters and meat-eaters in the UK show discrepant environmental impacts. *Nature Food*, [online] 4(7), pp.565–574. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-023-00795-w>
7. Ritchie, H., Roser, M. and Rosado, P. (2022). Environmental Impacts of Food Production. [online] Our World in Data. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food>
8. Ritchie, H. and Roser, M. (2021). Fish and Overfishing. Our World in Data, [online] 1(1). Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/fish-and-overfishing>.
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10. europa.eu. (n.d.). Eurobarometer. [online] Available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2996>
11. Sustainability strategy | The University of Manchester. [online] The University of Manchester. Available at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/social-responsibility/environmental-sustainability/our-sustainability-commitments/sustainability-strategy/>
12. The University of Manchester. (2021a). Divestment | The University of Manchester. [online] Available at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/social-responsibility/environmental-sustainability/our-sustainability-commitments/divestment/>
13. Islam, S.N. and Winkel, J. (2017). Climate Change and Social Inequality . [online] United Nations. Available at: https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2017/wp152_2017.pdf
14. The Nutrition Source. (2012). Protein. [online] Available at: <https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/what-should-you-eat/protein/#protein-bottom-line>
15. Sebo, J. (2022b). Saving animals, saving ourselves : why animals matter for pandemics, climate change, and other catastrophes. New York, Ny: Oxford University Press.
16. University of Oxford (2021). Sustainable eating is cheaper and healthier - Oxford study | University of Oxford. [online] University of Oxford. Available at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-11-11-sustainable-eating-cheaper-and-healthier-oxford-study>
17. GOV.UK. (n.d.). Mr J Casamitjana Costa v The League Against Cruel Sports: 3331129/2018. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions/mr-j-casamitjana-costa-v-the-league-against-cruel-sports-3331129-2018>.