

Q1. What is the issue you want to change? *

Tell us the background information about your idea or the problem you want to solve - so, for example, "lots of students nationally are raising awareness about sustainability because..."

The UN has stated that addressing the climate crisis will require bold and ambitious efforts *now*. Students care about their future and want to collaborate with their representative guild to make sure that due action is taken to protect it. We all share the same commitment to environmental and social sustainability. It is there in the university's sustainable procurement policy, the catering charter, and in our efforts to improve access to fair food during this cost of living crisis.

"The University of Birmingham recognises that its procurement activities have a significant impact on the environment, society and the economy and accepts that it has a responsibility to strive to effectively manage and minimise those impacts" (*Sustainable Procurement Policy, last updated Aug 2020*). UoB also acknowledges that catering outlets should "offer a wide range of products in vegetarian and vegan foods which contributes to reducing our carbon footprint" (*Catering Charter, June 2020*).

Globally, the largest proportion of emissions from food production comes from animal agriculture (57%). Comparatively, the production of plant-based foods only contributes to 29% of global emissions. The *worst* emitter of plant-based food contributes 12%, while beef contributes 25%¹. Should we transition to plant-based farming, the UK could free up 51% of its land for rewilding and carbon drawdown.² It is inclusive of all faiths and all religions (being halal and kosher). It helps tackle the climate crisis, the cost of living crisis, and it is truly sustainable for humans and the planet.

Our Guild should strive to both reform its partnerships, and lobby internally with the university, to implement more just and sustainable catering on campus. This will set a bold example and such shifts are already taking place. The University of Stirling SU has just passed a motion to transition to 100% plant-based by the year 2025 as a means to address the climate and ecological crisis.

Q2. What solutions or actions do you have?

What do you want to happen? What actions or solutions do you think would help tackle the problem you have identified? Why is your idea a solution?

Our proposal is twofold:

- For **The Student's Guild to endorse the Plant Based Universities Campaign** to support student campaigning, and lobby internally, for university-wide, 100% plant-based, and affordable food at UoB.

¹ [Global Green house gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice those of plant-based foods \(Nature Food, vol 2, 2021, pg 724 - 732\)](#)

² [Eating Away at Climate Change with Negative Emissions. Repurposing UK agricultural land to meet climate goals | Harvard, 2019.](#)

- For **guild-owned catering, procurement, and partnerships to go 50% plant-based by next academic year and 100% plant-based in the next 3 years.**

The roadmap for this transition could manifest in incremental shifts such as rolling our default plant milk across campus, meat-free Mondays, and increasingly more fully plant-based procurement partnerships. We are not asking for individual dietary change. Students will not be arrested for bringing a cheese sandwich onto campus. What we are asking for is institutional divestment. Because the UN has stated that addressing the climate crisis will require bold and ambitious efforts *now*. And According to this growing body of scientific literature, the transition towards a plant based food system is paramount to the security of our livelihoods and resources.

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 Oxford³ and Harvard.³

Q3. How will you know your idea is a success?

What impact do you think this change will have on the student experience? How can we know that the change has worked?

The Student's Guild 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. 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.

It is also likely that some students will be unsupportive of this shift, so it is important to emphasise that we are not asking for individual dietary change. Students can still bring whatever food they like onto campus. What we are asking for is institutional divestment within procurement in the same way that universities are boycotting fossil fuel companies. Because the UN has stated that addressing the climate crisis will require bold and ambitious efforts *now*. The climate and cost of living crises are inextricably linked to a government that has failed to plan and mitigate disaster. And we have the opportunity to do better. This is a preventable problem.

A recent YouGov poll has shown that 55% of students in the UK would like to see more plant-based options in university outlets. This is no surprise considering that, in the UK, 2 million people now identify as vegan and seven million as vegetarian. The concept of a plant based food system needs to shift from something once considered unthinkable to being celebrated as a key solution to the climate and nature emergency. Which is why we have also created, and are gathering [student/staff signatures](#) for, this [open letter](#) lobbying the university to act on this emerging science.

We can draw from case studies across the UK which demonstrate the social and financial viability of such a shift. The motion passed at Stirling to transition to 100% plant based catering by 2025 has been met with resistance from some students. Now, the activists and student union there have

³ [New estimates of the environmental cost of food | University of Oxford](#)

made the priority addressing such reactions with consideration, open communication, and solutions-based collaboration. At University College London when transitioning to default plant milk, they used the classic 'Net Promoter Score' survey which found that more than 80% of responders were in favour of the change. At UoB, the Plant Based Universities student group are also collecting signatures from students, staff, and societies in favour of a more just, sustainable, and plant based campus.

The Plant Based Universities campaign also has free and professional support from Forward Food. They offer training to catering staff, menu design consultancy, and climate footprint calculations of menus for free. Plant based universities are also affiliated with cooking organisations 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. 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 whole foods.