



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

FIRST “FOOD FOR THE BRAIN” UNIVERSITY IN THE UK

The University of Edinburgh was the first ever “Food For The Brain” University in the UK.

Food for the Brain is still very much in its infancy in both England and Scotland, and is a non-profit educational campaign, created by a group of nutritionists, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers and scientists to promote the link between nutrition and mental health. Its specific mission is to:

- **Promote** awareness of the link between learning, behaviour, mental health and nutrition.
- **Educate** and **provide educational material** to children, parents, teachers, schools, universities, the public, health professionals, caterers and the government thereby promoting mental health through optimum nutrition.
- **Develop** independently evaluated, effective and adoptable 'models' of how society can act to promote mental health through nutrition.

Schools

Its initial roots were in schools and the first school, a primary school in London for children with special educational needs, started with their nutrition 'makeover' after Easter 2006, a process that was followed by ITV's programme “Tonight with Trevor McDonald”. This involved workshops with both the kids and parents, in order to encourage them to try out new foods, fresh fruit and water every day at school, a ban on sugary drinks and snacks, and a super-healthy lunch menu. The children also did special exercises which enhance coordination. Each child was tested before and after, with a mid-point testing at three months. A second school started after the summer holidays in '06 and ran through till May '07, when the children sat their SATs tests, to enable a comparison of SATs scores from one year to the next. This was the first ever project of this kind and the results were striking. The teachers reported less impulsivity, which means the children could concentrate and learn better. The parents reported less hyperactivity and better social skills, which meant better behaviour.

Universities

Food for the Brain is very new to the further and higher education sector and the University of Edinburgh was the first in Scotland and in the UK to achieve the award, against very strict criteria.

The University has already in 8 of its 12 units achieved the Healthy Living Award, which is a Scottish Government initiative and a sign of healthier food when eating out in Scotland, whether that be in a workplace canteen, local sandwich shop, café or restaurant. However, whilst the Healthy Living Award rewards good practice and highlights businesses that are making it easier for their customers to eat healthily when eating out, Food For the Brain is a more focused approach with the specific aim to improve mental ability and performance.

Good nutrition plays a crucial role in learning, by improving energy levels and concentration, as well as helping to boost memory and brain function. Educational institutions and businesses are now recognising the need to make nutritious meals and snacks available on-site in order to improve students' and employees' academic and professional performance.

Assessment criteria include:

- Menu balance and nutrient value
- Ingredient selection and preparation
- Menu variety and suitability for special diets
- Staff awareness and signposting to the customer

Following the University's successful audit, in the words of the Assessor:

"I am pleased to confirm that you achieved and in fact surpassed the standards required for accreditation upon inspection last week and we are therefore delighted to award you accreditation – and to let you know that you are in fact the first UK University to receive this award."

This has firmly put the University on the map of Healthy Eating as the first university in the UK to have confronted issues of nutrition, head-on and under the scrutiny of external assessment.