GOOD FOOD POLICY

ANALYSIS & STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

MAY 2021

University of Edinburgh
Authors: Holly Martindale, Rachel Currah, Saad Khalid, Leanne Atkinson & Kira Palin
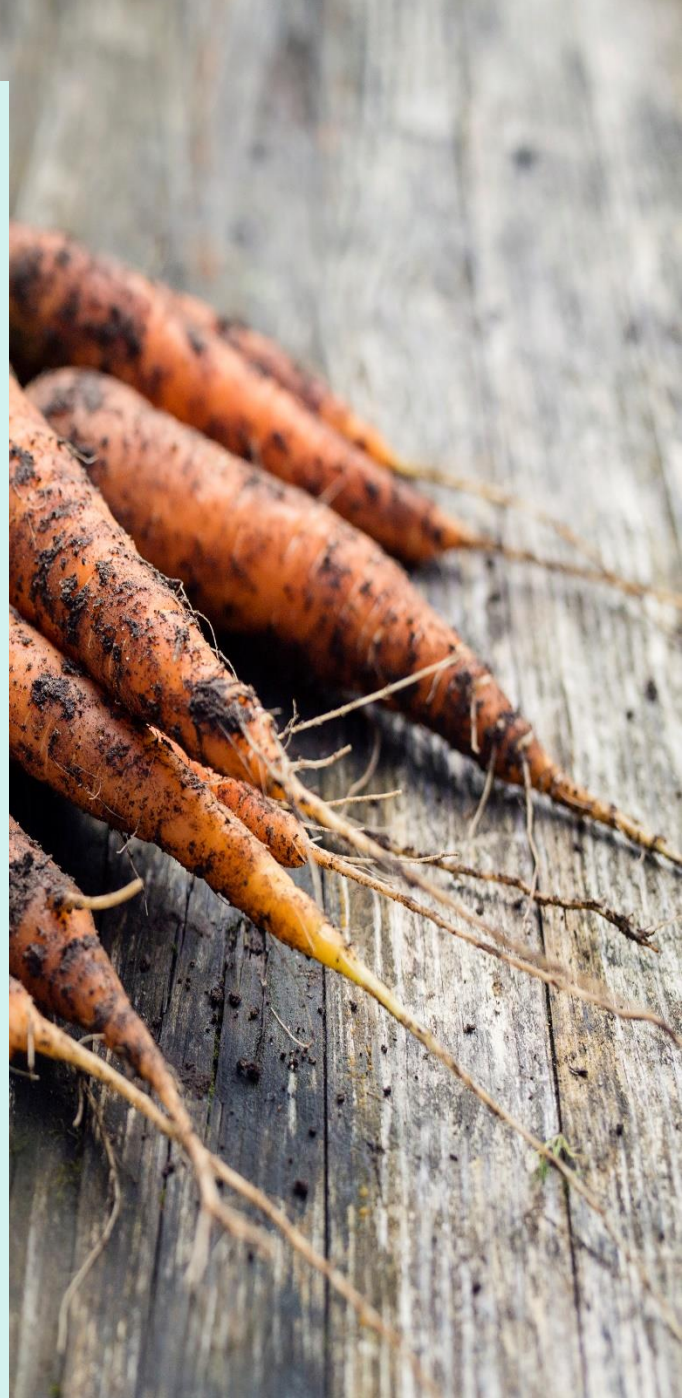
Table of Contents

Good Food Policy

ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this report is to provide a student perspective on The University of Edinburgh's Good Food Policy (GFP) with a focus on reducing food waste. Supported by the Global University Climate Forum and academics at The University of Edinburgh, we are a diverse team of five MSc students taking an interdisciplinary approach to helping our University improve some of their existing commitments to tackling climate change.

The Good Food Policy outlines the University's commitments to food systems that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. It contributes to the University's climate change strategies, including its Strategy 2030 and pledge to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. We have undertaken an in-depth analysis of the GFP, assessing the extent to which the policy succeeds on these terms. We detail key successes and offer recommendations for improvement. Recognising the impact that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had on the University staff's ability to deliver on the GFP, we are looking to the 2019-2020 academic year as our frame of reference for GFP implementation. Our analysis is informed by consultations with the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) and the Department of Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE).

The first section offers an analysis of the core commitments and overarching elements of the GFP and highlights key recommendations. We have compared the GFP with similar sustainable food policies at several universities across the UK to identify best practices that may also be relevant here at The University of Edinburgh. Finally, we have undertaken supplementary research on student perspectives around food waste. The results are analysed and recommendations for further research are provided.

The Good Food Policy's Core Commitments

In this section we highlight some of the key successes and challenges of each commitment category within the GFP. We draw on other university food policies and our own observations to make recommendations for each.

SOURCING

The University has shown willingness to source food and drink that follow economic, environmental, and social sustainability standards. This is reflected in the University's actions such as using traceable ingredients, ensuring that meat is Red Tractor assured, sourcing fish that is ranked 1 to 3 by Marine Conservation Society, upholding Fairtrade policy, promoting local communities, and highlighting seasonal ingredients in the menu.

The Fairtrade Certified products pool could be enhanced beyond tea, coffee, hot chocolate, bananas, sugar sticks, apple juice, rice, and chocolate by including further products. Meat-based options should include locally produced, Red Tractor approved, halal and kosher options to support the diversity within students and local communities. While purchasing products, an order of preference would be beneficial. This could range from organic local as highly preferable to organic Scottish, organic British, inorganic local, inorganic Scottish, and to inorganic British as least preferable. The commitment to use and highlight seasonal ingredients can be improved by communicating which meals have been prepared with these ingredients. For example, there could be a marker similar to the V, VE, GF markings to let people know what is in season.

> Key recommendation…
>
> **Provide a list of food suppliers and sources.** This would demonstrate transparency and traceability, providing students with valuable information about the food they are consuming.

PROVISION

The University has made great strides to ensure sustainability, and the wellbeing of staff and students. Positive measures include providing 50% vegetarian and plant-based options, labelling ingredients, and discouraging single-use bottled water. Plant-based and vegetarian grab-and-go meals are a fantastic addition to enhance healthy vending offerings. To improve further, students could be involved in menu planning to increase

engagement and satisfaction. Color-coding food according to its carbon footprint would be an innovative way to further engage students with sustainable food.

> Key recommendation…
> **Include students in menu planning.** This would actively engage students and ensure that the University cooks food the students will eat.

PRACTICE

The University makes substantial effort to reduce food waste; for example, by composting coffee grounds and using the 'Too Good To Go' app (used to sell food that would otherwise be wasted). Based on our conversations with Sandra Kinnear (ACE), staff at Pollock Halls minimise food waste by re-serving unfinished dishes in the salad bar the next day and using up ingredients in their cooking. This is extremely encouraging, demonstrating the University's consciousness of and commitment to reducing food waste.

The figure stating that 100% of food waste from the University food outlets is recycled through anaerobic digestion is very impressive. However, it is an inflated statistic, failing to account for food that ends up in general waste bins and food that is unable to be collected from outlets. While very encouraging, there is room for improvement, and we would love to see this expanded to include student residences and the University as a whole.

The GFP commitment to "minimise food and packaging waste" is welcome, but not particularly specific or measurable, and it is unclear what actions it entails. During our meeting with ACE, we were informed that the University has no way of measuring how much waste (kg) it produces outside of Pollock Halls, which makes it extremely difficult to know whether food waste reduction policies are effective. Increased monitoring would be beneficial. The University of Nottingham maintains daily logs of separated food waste, including kitchen waste, plate waste and spoilage. This could be implemented in catered halls to help evaluate and target areas for improvement.

Several current practices could be modified to make them more efficacious, including the frequency with which ACE engages with students about food waste. We suggest that this occurs on at least a quarterly basis. Making students conscious of the impacts of

food waste through education and regular engagement is a simple but effective way to address the issue and help students take their first steps in adopting food waste friendly habits. The policy on allowing students to bring 'doggy bags' for their leftovers could also be reviewed. However, we appreciate the concern about food hygiene, so a revised policy could initially be trialed which is limited to fruits, vegetables and carbohydrates, but no diary or meat.

Care must be taken when engaging students with portion sizes, as this can be triggering for individuals who have experienced, or are experiencing, eating disorders. It is not acceptable to directly ask students about their portion sizes, as has been done previously at Pollock Halls. Nevertheless, indirect measures can be acceptable within certain parameters. For example, large plates could be phased out in favour of smaller plates to encourage more manageable portion sizes. The University of Bristol has trialed an innovative scheme known as "no-tray days" where students do not use trays to collect their food in the halls of residence. Food waste on these days was reduced by 30%. In these scenarios, it would be important to allow students to return for seconds if they wish.

Key recommendation…

Introduce 'no-tray days' at catered halls of residence (as described above). This is a simple, cheap and potentially highly effective way of reducing food waste from leftovers. Considering the ethical implications of encouraging people to eat less, it is important to allow students to have seconds if they wish.

LEARNING, TEACHING & RESEARCH

The University provides many resources and opportunities for students to get involved and learn about reducing food waste. Such opportunities include the Love Food Hate Waste Campaign, Fairtrade Fortnight and student societies.

The University of New South Wales has employed effective strategies to engage students in the learning, teaching and research around food waste, partnering up with a food rescue charity to host a food waste competition. Teams of students created innovative solutions to the food waste problem by focussing on four main behaviours: look, buy, store and cook. The students heard from lecturers and mentors on the topic

and were given two days to devise a solution to help address the issue. A monetary prize was on offer for the winning team in order to incentivise participation.

The University could consider initiatives like the above or have a readily available, and well-advertised, contact whom students can approach with questions about food waste (e.g., EUSA staff). Learning and teaching could further be improved by providing a short, asynchronous, free course available for self-enrolment, which educates students on how to adopt a less wasteful lifestyle.

The excellent existing resources should be made more accessible to the student body, which could be done using pre-existing University apps, student emails, printed newsletters, student newspapers and even exercise machines in the gym. Stakeholders would include the University IT staff, students, the Waste Department, and possibly the Food Security and Sustainability Society and gym. Potential budget restrictions and gaining support from the IT and gym staff may present challenges.

> Key recommendation…
>
> **Bridge the information gap.** Ensure that students who wish to take part in the University's existing efforts can easily access information and get involved.

LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

The University shows strong sustainable food leadership, widely recognised by many awards, including the 2019 Food and Drink category of the Green Gown Award in Campus Health, Fairtrade University Award, and Food for Life Bronze Award for Pollock Halls. The 2019 uptake of the 'Too Good To Go' app demonstrates leadership, forward-thinking and a culture where food waste and its implications are taken seriously.

Excellent steps are being taken by the University and GFP, however, promotion and advertisement of the Policy is lacking. Stronger and more specific policy commitments to communicating this leadership work with students and other stakeholders would be welcomed, to encourage engagement with food waste issues and promote sustainable culture and awareness.

In our conversation with Sandra Kinnear (ACE), we were made aware of the challenges of providing halal options in cafés and student residences, due to issues of scale. ACE is unable to procure enough halal produce to offer a halal option to all. We suggest that

in the interim, halal options are made available at least to those who require them for religious and cultural reasons. This would reflect and accommodate greater cultural diversity, increasing the accessibility of University catering.

Cambridge University seeks to integrate its Sustainable Food Policy into supplier contracts. Strengthening and clarifying these commitments within the GFP would be an excellent way of demonstrating leadership by using the University's leverage to promote sustainable practices in the wider community. Stakeholders including ACE, procurement individuals and suppliers would need to be brought on board. It is important to stress that, if taken, such measures must appropriately support transition to better practices, as opposed to cutting off suppliers that do not currently meet requirements.

Achieving the appropriate balance would require further discussion, involving individuals with ethical procurement expertise. The Sustainable Food Policy Guide recommends a "means to measure progress against a scaled standard so that superior performance by contractors and vendors can be recognised and rewarded." We recognise that the development of such a policy would represent many challenges (organisational, logistical, ethical etc.). However, it remains a fantastic opportunity to further the University's sustainability aims in the wider community, thereby demonstrating excellent leadership and culture.

Key recommendation…

> **Involve suppliers in delivering on the Good Food Policy.** At the next Good Food Policy review, we recommend that stronger commitments for involving suppliers be included.

Overarching Elements

During the 2019-20 academic year, the University produced the Good Food at a Glance infographic to communicate some of its key achievements. The University also produces annual Implementation Plans to identify milestones relating to the core commitments of the GFP. These practices help to ensure transparency and accountability and should continue to be prioritised; however, we have identified ways that they can be strengthened.

1

While we recognise the importance of broad language to allow for flexibility and responsiveness to changing situations, it is equally important to clearly indicate how **monitoring and evaluation** is taking place. It is best practice to communicate to stakeholders how the commitments included in a policy will be measured, particularly when the commitments themselves are broad.

It would be beneficial to include a section dedicated to monitoring and evaluation at the next revision of the GFP. Cambridge University's Sustainable Food Policy would serve as a helpful jumping-off point for the types of indicators that could be adapted to The University of Edinburgh's context. Some examples include:
- Carbon emissions per kilogram of food procured
- Proportion of plant-based meals served in catered halls
- Kilograms of waste generated within the Estate

By setting indicators, it will also be easier to set short-term goals (i.e., smaller goals for each academic year, like the Implementation Plans). This would also provide helpful communication material for contextualising and communicating successes to students and staff.

2

The current review cycle for the GFP is every 3 years. Most of the policies from other UK universities that we reviewed had **2-year review cycles**. It would be relevant to consider changing the GFP review cycle to ensure responsiveness and alignment with emerging issues, opportunities, and resources. It may also aid with increasing transparency and accountability.

Student Perspectives Survey

The above policy analysis stands on its own. To supplement it, we undertook a survey with University of Edinburgh students, the findings of which support our recommendations. The survey aims to increase the University's understanding of student perceptions and engagement with the issue of food waste, both on campus and in their personal lives. The attached Appendix contains the list of survey questions. It is important to note that the survey respondents are a convenience sample, thus it is not representative of the entire student body. The survey is intended as an exploratory study that may point to some areas for further analysis and consideration. Data analysis was conducted via SPSS and the key findings are discussed below.

Key Findings

The survey had 57 respondents, of which 46% were undergraduate students, 42% were postgraduate students and 12% were PhD students. When asked if food waste was a problem, 86% of respondents considered it to be a serious or extremely serious problem. **When asked if the University has a responsibility to decrease food waste and help students to do the same, 96% of respondents agreed**.

Bivariate statistical tests showed that the more important respondents thought the issue of food waste was, the more likely they were to perceive challenges to reducing food waste. When food is wasted, we asked respondents what the biggest reasons for this are. The main reasons are represented by the bar chart below. Note that respondents could choose all reasons that applied to them.

Reasons for individual food waste

Though the survey is not representative of the entire student population, this question does provide insight into topics that the University could target with communication efforts, or provide support for students as part of the GFP's Learning, Teaching and Research commitments. Indeed, when asked to describe how the University could most effectively engage students in food waste issues, social media was the preferred channel. It should be noted, however, that this question was optional and was answered by 6 out of 57.

When asked if they actively try to reduce food waste in their daily lives, 88% of survey respondents either always try to reduce food waste or try to reduce food waste most of the time. Understanding why students make efforts to reduce food waste can be useful in determining what types of communication campaigns will have the largest behavioural impact on the audience. **The biggest motivator for reducing food waste, by far, was environmental concerns with 44% of respondents ranking it as their number 1 reason.** Moral and ethical concerns came as the second highest motivator at 24%, and saving money was a lesser but still relevant motivator at 13%. Students' understanding of food waste's negative environmental impacts and its contribution to CO_2 emissions was also evident when asked what impacts students are aware of. However, this question was optional and was responded to by 5 students out of 57, so this should not be understood to represent the student population's overall understanding of food waste impacts.

Further statistical tests showed that the more aware of the impacts that food waste has on the environment, the more likely the respondent would be to consider food waste, in general, to be a serious problem. However, **58% of respondents said that they only know <u>some</u> of the impacts that food waste has on the environment**, which was the middle response category on a continuous scale of 5 options. An increase by 1 unit on the scale of knowledge of impacts on the environment means that the person is 2.6 times more likely to have environmental concerns as their highest motivator for reducing food waste.

Finally, **awareness of the University's actions to reduce food waste was low among respondents**. Only 26% of respondents knew about the University cafés' use of the 'Too Good To Go' app, while under 10% were aware of the following initiatives: coffee ground recycling into soil conditioner; cooking oil recycling into biodiesel; and, 100% of food waste being recycled through anaerobic digestion.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings presented above may point to some key areas for further research and attention. Respondents who actively try to reduce food waste are strongly motivated by environmental impacts. Increasing someone's knowledge of the environmental impacts had a significant impact on their motivations. Taken together, it may be possible for the University to influence students' behaviours by increasing communication and learning around the environmental impacts of food waste. This could be achieved, for example, through a communications campaign involving the Edinburgh University Students Association.

As part of an optional section of our survey, we asked students to give us their thoughts on food waste reduction initiatives. The answers mainly focused on actions that the University could take to engage students and help them with reducing food waste. Below are the key points that came up in the answers and which reflect many of the results from the policy analysis. The list contains both creative and feasible options for the University to engage students in food waste reduction.

1. Increase social media visibility
2. Educate students on how to reduce food waste
    - Give them tools and provide infrastructure, such as:
        - Food waste bins
        - Possibility to compost
    - Information sessions for first-year students and visiting students about the University's Zero Waste mentality
    - Cooking classes for leftover foods
    - Meal and grocery shop planning
3. Enforce stricter rules on reducing food waste
    - Students to take more responsibility for their actions

For further information, contact Rachel Currah (R.E.Currah@sms.ed.ac.uk).

Appendix - Survey Questions

Are you a student at the University of Edinburgh?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Are you an undergraduate, postgraduate or PhD student?

- ○ Undergraduate
- ○ Postgraduate
- ○ PhD

What type of accommodation do you live in?

- ○ University hall of residence
- ○ Private hall of residence
- ○ Private flat / house
- ○ Parent's / guardian's home
- ○ [   ] Other, please specify

Do you struggle financially to buy enough food?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say

Habits

For this set of questions, think about your own patterns of personal food consumption (food shopping, preparing food at home, takeaway, eating at restaurants etc.)

I consider food waste to be a problem.

Not a problem	A small problem	A moderate problem	A serious problem	An extremely serious problem
○	○	○	○	○

It is important to me to reduce food waste.

Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
○	○	○	○	○

I actively try to reduce food waste.

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
○	○	○	○	○

Starting at university is often a big change in students' lives, which can result in certain behaviours being amplified or restricted.

To what extent has the amount of food waste you generate changed since becoming a student at the University of Edinburgh?

I produce a lot less	I produce a little less	I produce about the same	I produce a little more	I produce a lot more	Not sure
○	○	○	○	○	○

I could reduce food waste more.

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
○	○	○	○	○

If I wish to reduce food waste further, I know how to do so.

I don't know	I have some knowledge	I have good knowledge	I have very good knowledge	I do not want to/cannot reduce my food waste
O	O	O	O	O

How do you reduce food waste? (optional)

[   ]

I know what impacts food waste has on the environment.

I don't know any	I know very few	I know some	I know many	I know very many
O	O	O	O	O

What impacts are you aware of? (optional)

[   ]

I am facing challenges within my accommodation to reduce as much food waste as I would want to (e.g. lack of microwave, fridge, lack of food waste bins provided by the council/university residence etc.).

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
O	O	O	O	O

Motivations

What is your main motivation for reducing food waste? Please rank in order of importance 1 (main motivation) - 5 (least motivating)

☐ Saving money

☐ Saving time

☐ Environmental concerns

☐ Moral/ethical reasons

☐ I was taught to by my parents/ guardians

☐ Other, please specify [_____]

Who are the main actors that should support/encourage you to reduce food waste? (select all that apply)

☐ Family
☐ Friends
☐ Housemates/ co-habitants
☐ University
☐ NGOs
☐ Government
☐ [_____] Other, please specify

If you do not try to reduce food waste, what are the reasons for this? (select all that apply)

☐ Food is cheap.
☐ Food is easy to replace.
☐ I do not think about it.
☐ I have always thrown away food.
☐ I do not have the necessary tools (e.g., fridge, microwave, food waste bin)
☐ N/A - I do try to reduce food waste
☐ [_____] Other, please specify

When you do waste food, what are the main reasons for this? (select all that apply)

- ☐ I do not waste any food.
- ☐ Portion sizes too large (catered meals).
- ☐ Portion sizes too large (self-catered meals).
- ☐ I can see that the food has gone off.
- ☐ The food has passed its expiration date.
- ☐ I prepare too much food.
- ☐ Lack of knowledge about how to use up food.
- ☐ I am too busy to cook what I had planned to.
- ☐ I bought too much food when shopping.
- ☐ [_____] Other, please specify

University

I am aware of the University's food waste reduction actions.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Which actions are you aware of? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Cafés' use of Too Good to Go App
- ☐ 100% of food waste is recycled through anaerobic digestion
- ☐ Coffee grounds recycled into soil conditioner
- ☐ Cooking oil recycled into bio-diesel
- ☐ None
- ☐ [_____] Other, please specify

I would like to be informed about / engaged in the University's food waste actions.

Strongly disagree   Somewhat disagree   Neither agree nor disagree   Somewhat agree   Strongly agree
     ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If so, what do you think is the most effective way that the University can engage you? (optional)

[   ]

The University has a responsibility to decrease food waste and help students to do so.

Strongly disagree   Somewhat disagree   Neither agree nor disagree   Somewhat agree   Strongly agree
     ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Do you have any additional thoughts about reducing food waste? (optional)

[   ]