

Healthy Universities Report: A Focus on Nutrition

Contents

Summary.....	p.3
Background and Evidence.....	p.3
2.1 Context of the study.....	p.3
2.2 Questionnaire Design and Methodology.....	p.4
2.3 Key Findings.....	p.4
2.3.1 Demographics and General Awareness.....	p.4-5
2.3.2 Nutrition Knowledge and Behaviour.....	p.5-6
2.3.3 Cooking Facilities and Barriers.....	p.6
Aims and Objectives.....	p.7
3.1 Objectives.....	p.7
Implementation Strategies.....	p.7
4.1 Revamp University Food Outlets.....	p.7
4.2 Launch “Eat Smart @ Uni” Campaign.....	p.8
4.3 Address Campus Inequities.....	p.8
4.4 Collaborate with Local Suppliers.....	p.8
Goals.....	p.8-9
Evaluation Plan.....	p.9
6.1 Quantitative Metrics.....	p.9
6.2 Qualitative Feedback.....	p.9
Conclusion.....	p.9-10
References.....	p.11
Appendices.....	p.12

Summary

This report investigates the state of nutrition within a university setting through the lens of the Healthy Universities initiative. Using data collected from three structured questionnaires—focusing on demographics and nutrition awareness, nutrition knowledge, and cooking facilities/barriers—this study provides insight into the eating habits, nutritional understanding, and perceived barriers faced by all students at the Carmarthen campuses.

Findings highlight that while many respondents are aware of general nutritional guidelines, they often face practical challenges such as time constraints, affordability issues and insufficient healthy food options on campus. These findings underpin a series of recommendations to improve access, education and engagement with healthy eating across the university. Implementation strategies include improving food outlets, increasing nutritional visibility, providing targeted support for vulnerable groups and incorporating nutrition into wider health promotion efforts. The report outlines specific, measurable goals and an evaluation plan to ensure sustainable improvement and alignment with the Healthy Universities model.

Background and Evidence

2.1 Context of the Study

The Healthy Universities framework encourages higher education institutions to integrate health and well-being into all aspects of campus life—from policy to practice (Dooris et al., 2010). Nutrition plays a central role in this model, with strong links to student performance, mental health, and long-term well-being (Dooris et al., 2010). Recognising the need to assess the current landscape regarding nutrition, three separate questionnaires were created and distributed across the campus. These instruments were designed to capture a broad view of health-related behaviours, nutritional understanding and the challenges faced by individuals in maintaining a healthy diet while studying or working at university.

2.2 Questionnaire Design and Methodology

Surveys were administered over a few-week period using Microsoft Forms, with dissemination via university newsletters, social media platforms and classroom announcements. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was preserved to encourage honest responses. A total of approximately 20 participants responded across all three questionnaires, offering a valuable cross-section of opinions. While the sample size limits the generalizability of results, the data gathered provides significant insights into the nutritional habits and barriers facing the university community. Findings from three distinct questionnaires allows for a multi-dimensional view of how infrastructure, knowledge and attitudes combine to influence health behaviours.

Three distinct but interrelated questionnaires were developed:

1. Demographic & Nutrition Perception Questionnaire

- Target: General student

2. Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire

- Target: Primarily students
- Focus: Eating habits, frequency of food types consumed, understanding of healthy eating practices

3. Cooking Facilities & Barriers to Healthy Eating Questionnaire

- Target: Students living in university or rented accommodation
- Focus: Cooking habits, barriers to eating well, satisfaction with available food facilities

The questionnaires were shared via university mailing lists and promoted through student union channels. Respondents included a diverse mix of students including individuals living in halls, rented flats or their own homes.

2.3 Key Findings

2.3.1 Demographics and General Awareness

- Out of 17 responses, 24% were under 25, 76% were over 25.
- 29% were male, 59% female and 12% non-binary.

- 35% lived in halls of residence without catering, 6% lived in halls of residence with catering, 12% off-campus (rented accommodation) and 47% lived in their own property.
- 71% have completed a formal study in human nutrition and 29% did not.
- 59% meet government guidelines for physical activity, 35% did not know what the guidelines are, and one did not follow the guidelines.
- 59% participants responded that the university does not provide with guidance or information on healthy eating, 29% felt that the university do provide the information and 12% is was not sure.
- Many participants rated their own nutrition knowledge as “good” (53%) or “very good” (29%), some reported it as being fair (12%) and one reported it as being poor.
- Most follow an omnivore or pescatarian diet (76%).
- Majority of the respondents strongly agree that healthy diet is important for health and wellbeing (71%), others agree (18%) and some neither agree or disagree (6%) or disagree (6%).
- Equal amount reported their cooking skills as excellent (35%) or fair (35%) and some reported it as good (29%).
- Lastly, 65% believe that their diet it healthy, 18% say it is neither, 12% consider their nutrition as very healthy and 6% unhealthy.

2.3.2 Nutrition Knowledge and Behaviour

- A high percentage reported regular consumption of fruits (56.3%), vegetables (68.8%) and wholegrains (50%) showing a strong awareness of the importance of plant-based foods.
- A few participants mentioned eating fruits and vegetable on most days suggesting fairly consistent habits though not always optimal.
- Very few reported consuming fruits or vegetable only once a week indicating that most students aim for regular intake.
- Intake of sugary drinks and processed foods was quite low, though fried food and sweets were consumed several times weekly by many.
- Most participants limit their intake of sugar sweetened beverages with many answering ‘never’ or ‘occasionally’.

- Similarly, foods such as biscuits/cakes/crisps were chosen less often by most respondents, though a few responded listed eating them 'most days'.
- A small number of students consumed confectionery, sweets or chocolate multiple times per week, suggesting that while awareness is high, cravings and habits may still affect choices.
- Chips and deep-fried foods were mostly consumed 'occasionally' or 'never' which is a positive sign for overall health.
- Many respondents said they consume fish once or two-three times a week aligning with recommendations for omega 3-intake however, few respondents reported 'never' which may point to dietary restrictions or affordability issues.
- Beans and pulses are eaten regularly by most with responses like 'most days' or '2-3 times per week' indicating solid plant-based protein awareness.
- Majority of students reported eating wholegrains either 'every day' or 'most days' showing positive habits around high-fibre sources.
- Participants showed a moderate level of understanding about healthy food groups.

2.3.3 Cooking Facilities and Barriers

- Many students reported eating either in a cafe, coffee shop, sandwich bar, pub or have a takeaway several times a week.
- All students feel confident in cooking from scratch.
- 73% reported cooking from scratch daily, 18% cook 2-3 times a week and 6% less than once a week but more than once a month.
- Cooking facilities does not seem to be a problem which indicates that the campus is not an issue to prepare food and 64% reported that cooking facilities does not affect ability to cook.
- Time management, cost, and convenience were consistently listed as barriers to healthy eating.
- Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the cost and quality of food at university-managed outlets, such as Merlin Café and S4C.

Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of this project is to enhance the nutritional health of university students, aligning with the Healthy Universities initiative and broader public health goals.

3.1 Objectives

1. Improve Access to Nutritious Food

- Ensure fresh, balanced meals are affordable and available on all campuses.

2. Increase Nutritional Awareness

- Educate students and staff on healthy eating through engaging campaigns.

3. Support Sustainable and Inclusive Choices

- Encourage plant-based, low-waste meals and cater to dietary requirements such as vegetarian, vegan, halal, or gluten-free diets.

4. Engage Students in Decision-Making

- Create platforms for feedback and peer-led initiatives.

Implementation Strategies

Based on questionnaire data, the following actions are proposed to address the university community's needs:

4.1 Revamp University Food Outlets

- **Menu Expansion:** Introduce daily vegetarian, vegan, and low-fat options in all cafes.
- **Nutritional Transparency:** Add calorie counts and food group icons (e.g., high-fibre, low-sugar) on menus.
- **Meal Bundles:** Offer value bundles like "Soup + Bread + Water" at subsidised prices.

4.2 Launch “Eat Smart @ Uni” Campaign

- Content Delivery: Use posters, email newsletters, digital screens and social media to share nutrition facts, tips, and easy meal ideas.
- Student Involvement: Create ambassador roles for nutrition students or health societies to run workshops and social events.

4.3 Address Campus Inequities

- Access Plan: Introduce pop-up salad and soup bars in underserved campuses during lunch hours.
- Feedback Stations: Install QR-coded surveys at food outlets to gather real-time satisfaction data.

4.4 Collaborate with Local Suppliers

- Use local produce in university catering to support sustainable, seasonal and affordable menus.

Goals

The university will adopt a SMART goal framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound):

Short-Term (0–6 Months)

- Introduce nutritional labelling across all food outlets.
- Launch the “Eat Smart @ Uni” campaign with weekly themes.
- Replace 30% of vending machine contents with healthy snacks.

Medium-Term (6–12 Months)

- Improve satisfaction with campus food to 80% (based on follow-up surveys).
- Increase purchases of healthy meal options by 20%.
- Establish Nutrition & Wellbeing Advisory Board.

Long-Term (1–2 Years)

- Achieve recognition from the UK Healthy Universities Network.

- Embed nutrition education into student induction and personal development programs.
- Reduce reported barriers to healthy eating by 50% based on follow-up questionnaires.

Evaluation Plan

A rigorous evaluation framework will be adopted to ensure continued improvement:

6.1 Quantitative Metrics

- Surveys: Repeat current questionnaires annually to assess progress.
- Sales Data: Monitor food purchases and vending machine trends.
- Engagement: Track social media analytics and workshop attendance.

6.2 Qualitative Feedback

- Focus Groups: Conduct termly student focus groups across campuses.
- Pop-Up Interviews: Collect live feedback at food events and dining areas.

Conclusion

This report explored how nutrition is experienced by students across the university, especially on the Carmarthen campus. By using three different questionnaires, it looked closely at what students know about healthy eating, what they actually eat, and the challenges they face when trying to eat well. Although many students understand the basics of nutrition and want to eat healthily, they often run into problems like limited time, high food prices and a lack of healthy options on campus. The findings show that improving nutrition at university is not just about telling people what to eat—it is also about making it easier for them to make better choices. Many students said they can cook and are willing to eat well, but they need more support from the university. This includes better food options in campus cafés, clearer food labelling and more education through campaigns or workshops. The report also puts forward realistic goals that the university can work toward in the short and long term. These include changing what is sold in vending machines, improving food

satisfaction rates and setting up a student-led Nutrition and Wellbeing board. If these goals are met, they will help create a healthier campus where nutritious food is more available, affordable and appealing.

Word count- 1808

References

Dooris, M.T., Cawood, J., Doherty, S. and Powell, S. (2010) *Healthy Universities: Concept, model and framework for applying the healthy settings approach within higher education in England*. Available at: https://clouk.uclan.ac.uk/5632/1/5632_HU-Final_Report-FINAL_v2.pdf (Accessed: 10 April 2025).

Appendices

A) Meeting minutes

Meeting MINUTES Iza

DATE: 28th November 2024 (2-4pm)

CHAIR: Hannah

PARTICIPANTS: Dave, Steph, Caz, Hannah, Ria, Izabela

MINUTES:

During this meeting we have found out that Steph received an email back from the group president for student union – Maria Dinu. She responded that she is happy to meet up with us through a Teams meeting to answer our questions. Therefore, Steph will respond to her by asking her when a suitable time for the meeting would be. Also, Hannah has tried emailing the registry to find out how many students stay at the halls and how many are studying at the campus however, she had an automatic response saying they will get back to us with the next 20 working days. We need to send another email to student services asking if they could send out our Questionnaire to all the students in order for us to gather the data. Caz agreed to send an email to the student accommodation regarding student halls and how many students live on the campus.

We have discussed the potential questions that we could ask Maria Dinu during the Teams meeting. During the meeting we will have one person taking notes/ key points of the answers rather than engage in the discussion.

Hannah and Caz emails– still ongoing.....

The potential questions for Maria Dinu:

1. Does the union have any part in student health and nutrition?

If not, are you aware of who does?

2. Are there any partnerships with organizations or initiatives, or policies promoting healthy eating internally or externally to the university?

3. What challenges does the campus face in providing a wider variety of healthy food options?

4. How can students provide ongoing feedback about the food options on campus?

5. Are there forums or channels where students can suggest improvements or highlight issues?

6. What is the student union's understanding of students' expectations regarding healthy eating on campus?

7. Would you be willing to send out our questionnaire to people on Carmarthen campus for us?

8. Are you aware of the Healthy universities scheme?

We have all agreed that everyone knows how to use Microsoft Forms. We will split the sections of the questionnaire between us all so that everyone can contribute to putting the questionnaire together.

The sections include:

1. Demographics - 16 questions

2. Knowledge and practice – 20 questions

3. Use of facilities – limitations – student experience for healthy eating_ 10/15 questions

We aim to put the questionnaire together and run a trial before Christmas. This will give us enough time to collect the data. If unsuccessful, we will send the questionnaire again after Christmas.

I have put together a summary of what and why we are doing the research. This can be copied and pasted into all emails and the questionnaire for everyone to understand the aim of the project.

The summary is as follows:

The research focuses on understanding the nutritional landscape at UWTSU and identifying opportunities for improvements. The aim of this research is to evaluate the nutritional environment, dietary habits and food accessibility on the campus. Through this research, the goal is to identify potential gaps in nutrition offerings and raise awareness about healthy eating.

As students from the 3rd year undertaking the Health, Nutrition and Lifestyle course decided to carry out a research project through the following steps: Observing campus facilities - by visiting dining areas, analyzing the menu; variety, pricing, health-conscious options and noting the accessibility of dining facilities during various times of the day. Also, having the knowledge on nutrition, we will conduct a nutritional assessment by analyzing the calorie content and macronutrient balance of commonly served meals. Additionally, we will compare the costs of healthy vs. less nutritious options. We also decided to survey students by creating a questionnaire to ask about their eating habits, preferences, satisfaction with on-campus nutrition and whether students rely more on off-campus dining. By engaging with campus services, we want to interview dining staff or food service providers to better understand their

B) Questionnaires

Cooking Facilities and Barriers to Healthy Eating Questionnaire

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey that has been developed by Level 6 students on the BSc Health, Nutrition and Lifestyle degree to investigate healthy eating on the Carmarthen campus of UWTSU.

Your responses are entirely confidential and will only be used as part of a student assignment and summarised to be reported to the University, through the Staff / Student committee for the School of Sport and Healthy Living.

Please check below to provide consent so your responses can be used as part of this survey analysis.

Demographic Questionnaire Healthy University/Public Policy

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey that has been developed by Level 6 students on the BSc Health, Nutrition and Lifestyle degree to investigate Healthy Eating on the Carmarthen Campus of UWTSD.
Your responses are entirely confidential and will only be used as part of a student assignment and summarised to be reported to the University, through the Staff / Student committee for the School of Sport and Healthy Living.
Please check below to provide consent so your responses can be used as part of this survey analysis.

Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey that has been developed by Level 6 students on the BSc Health, Nutrition and Lifestyle degree to investigate healthy eating on the Carmarthen campus of UWTSD.
Your responses are entirely confidential and will only be used as part of a student assignment and summarised to be reported to the University, through the Staff / Student committee for the School of Sport and Healthy Living.
Please check below to provide consent so your responses can be used as part of this survey analysis.