

Green Impact Project Plus
SEED food waste project (November 2016)
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Summary

The project highlighted the issue of food waste generated at University events and how to reduce this waste. It aimed to give insight into workplace practices and to raise awareness of the need to balance the positive benefits of providing food and the factors that impact negatively from a sustainability viewpoint that are often unseen or not acknowledged. This was done by piloting a staff food waste survey in SEED, a University student food waste survey and through interviews with staff who order food for events in SEED and a café worker for FoodOnCampus. The project sits well with Goal 3 of the Manchester 2020 vision that includes a commitment to environmental sustainability.

Two Project Assistant students we worked with suggested that only by collecting data on actual food wastage from events could decisions be made regarding how to reduce this waste. Due to the small amount of participation in the staff survey, it was not possible to test this premise. The majority of findings have resulted from the student survey and the interviews. The need to engage both staff (PSS and academic) and students in the topic of sustainability and food is indicated if changes are to be made in this area at the University.

Food provision at University events was seen to be important by both staff and students. Both were also concerned with food wastage from these activities with staff citing financial and moral reasons for their concern. Staff interviewed suggested reasons why food may be wasted and currently take active steps to reduce food wastage where they can. More food is generally wasted at events where there is a choice for staff or students to attend, where the event is free and where there is no definite obligation for them to attend. Both students and staff recommended ways to further reduce wastage and there is an indication of a desire to re-distribute leftover food to charities through a formal collection system.

There is an overlap between foods that are 'easy to eat' that staff recommend purchasing with this preference given by students. There is also some indication that students favour healthier food, particularly fruit, alongside sandwiches, savouries and cakes. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the project.

Recommendations

Food waste reduction options

Awareness raising

* Raise awareness in all staff (particularly PSS and academic staff requesting food) of the desire to reduce food waste at University events - this may help towards removing an apparent dis-connect between requesting food and not seeing the end result of leftover food.

- * Question the need for food provision. It may be 'legitimate and beneficial' to provide food, but that question needs to be asked, rather than assuming food is necessary for an event.
- * Question the content and value of certain events if food is being used as 'an incentive' to attend.
- * Provide 'good news' stories and examples of positive initiatives on campus relating to food – to avoid the sustainability message to reduce food waste being seen in a negative light. Consider linking with any University College or Manchester Leadership Programme units/projects relating to sustainability and food.
- * Communicate to staff recommendations of 'good practice' for food provision at events

Change in practice – for staff requesting and ordering food

- * Consider the timing of meetings – avoid if possible, times where food would normally be expected, such as lunch/tea time
- * Question the necessity for provision of cakes/croissants for short meetings
- * Consider not providing food at certain meetings – for example, short internal meetings. This is now standard practice at training events run by STDU – it is advised by email that food will not be provided.
- * Order food that is 'easy to eat'
- * Consider the provision of individually plated food – for example one supplier can provide an 'executive' lunch pack.
- * Avoid using suppliers with a minimum spend or numbers required
- * Consider more fruit and vegetarian options at student events (alongside sandwich/savoury pastry and sweet items).
- * Ask staff/students to pre-book at large events

Information/communication

- * Include an 'Impact statement' or logo attached to email signatures to raise awareness of reducing food waste (similar to 'don't print unless necessary' statements designed to reduce unnecessary printing of emails).
- * Put a suitable paragraph in the invitation to an event regarding the University's desire to reduce food waste and that unless confirmation is confirmed, food will not be provided.
- * Advise in letters to students that bottled water will not be provided at assessment days.
- * Be pro-active when confirming numbers invited to an event.

Dialogue with suppliers – at University level or individual level, where appropriate

- * Speak with suppliers regarding wanting to reduce food waste and provide specific examples where certain practices may help – e.g. need for flexibility/substitution when ordering, exclusion of foods that are generally wasted – for example garnish, dips, salad (presented as garnish) and crisps (unless bagged).
- * By negotiation with food suppliers it would be possible for them to provide water glasses/jug for use at events which they would collect (similar to collecting cups) when they collect food trays for re-use (in conjunction with assessing the feasibility of the expansion of useable plumbed in water coolers).

- * Negotiate a reduction in the daily delegate rate if certain items (such as cake in the morning and afternoon) are excluded.
- * If a particular supplier over supplies food – ask them to provide less (or order less).

Alternatives to food

- * Consider providing vouchers instead of food – to be used at FoodOnCampus cafés – these are particularly effective in induction weeks (un-used vouchers can be used at future events) but would need to consider the accessibility and size of cafés near to the event.
- * Use vouchers to ‘top up’ supplies if running low (contingency plan)

Optimisation options (redistribution to people)

- * Look at the legalities in terms of health and safety to distribute leftover food from events to charities.
- * Look at the feasibility of establishing a University wide system whereby leftover food from events is diverted to charities.

Recycling and recovery options (food composting and/or energy recovery)

- * Consider investigating the feasibility of expanding the current use of ‘ReFood’¹ at the University (or alternative recycling providers) to include food waste collection from University events.

¹ <http://refood.co.uk>