Healthy and Sustainable Food Working Group

Summary

This is a case study describing the development of a Healthy University working group on Healthy and Sustainable Food. The drivers and partners involved and the development of an action plan to take work forward within UCLan. The working group brought together colleagues from across UCLan, the SU and external partners to build on existing practice and to work collaboratively on a range of objectives that include procurement, affordable and healthier food, promotion of healthy eating and food safety. The working group continues to be an important part of the UCLan Healthy University initiative.

Aims

- To increase the consumption of healthier and sustainable food by students, staff and visitors.
- To develop a new working group focusing on healthy eating issues.
- To review current practice and develop an action plan.

Overview

What was the context / background?

UCLan has a well established Healthy University initiative, having a structure where working groups were established to take forward work. Although UCLan catering ran customer focus groups with staff and students, there had not been healthy eating working group as part of the Healthy University initiative.

What were the drivers and levers for change?

- The Healthy Settings Development Unit at UCLan had a new post which was seconded to the North West Strategic Health Authority to co-ordinate a North West Food and Health Task Force. This brought expertise into the unit and partnership links were established with the Healthy University initiative. We were encouraged to form a working group on food.
- The increasing policy focus on obesity and the publication of national level documents such as the Foresight Report, Tackling Obesity: Future Choices (2007) and Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives (2008).
- A commitment from the Healthy University initiative to linking health and sustainable development agendas, alongside a convergence of these agendas nationally and internationally.

Who led the work internally and externally?

The Director of the Healthy Settings Development Unit and the Co-ordinator of the North West Food and Health Task Force.

Who was the strategic lead, who was the operational lead?

- Strategic lead was Mark Dooris, Director of the Healthy Settings Development Unit.
- Operational lead was Sharon Doherty, the Healthy University Co-ordinator.

How are you set up?

The Healthy and Sustainable Food Working Group is part of the Healthy University structure, the group reports to the Healthy University steering group.

How does the work fit within your organisational structure?

It fits within the Healthy University structure, reporting to the steering group which is chaired by a member of Directorate and in turn reports to the Safety, Health and Environment Committee.

What resources did you need (financial and human)?

The key resource for the working group was staff time.

What existing resources did you use / what was your budget?

- Used BBC Grub Club resources for student campaigns.
- Linked to existing events such as SU Give it a go weeks.
- SU catering staff volunteered their time for cooking demos.
- Healthy University budget used for meeting hospitality costs etc.

What did you do?

- The Healthy University invited key people to an exploratory meeting in 2007 on catering and healthy eating. UCLan and SU catering, a nutrition lecturer, and the North West Food Task Force Co-ordinator attended.
- The group discussed what was already in place and key areas for development. Individuals recognised that it would beneficial for UCLan and SU catering to make stronger links. The group suggested a formal action plan should be developed.
- The group used the North West Healthy Catering Guidelines as a base line for auditing current practice.
- The group was renamed the Healthy and Sustainable Food working group to better reflect the objectives.
- The group developed the following objectives and has overseen activity as summarised:
  1. **Move towards a healthier and more sustainable food supply chain**: Through purchasing consortia, contract specifications written to reflect shift towards a healthier and more sustainable supply chain.
  2. **Increase the provision of affordable healthier food for the diverse university community**: Consultation and training undertaken with chefs/catering staff; menus, recipes, portion sizes and preparation methods reviewed; action plan produced aimed at affordable and diverse provision that achieves reductions in salt, fat and sugar, and increases in fruit, vegetables and pulses.
  3. **Improve consumer information through provision of clear and consistent food labelling**: Specific pilot work (e.g. sandwiches) developed with suppliers within existing contracts; future contract specifications written to reflect requirement for clear and consistent labelling; system agreed between UCLan and SU to highlight healthier eating products in outlets, e.g. image/messages used, specific products, times.
  4. **Raise awareness of the benefits of eating healthier, food safety and sustainable food**: Healthier eating messages integrated into menus, table top promotions etc. reflecting national focus.
  5. **Improve student's skills relevant to healthier eating, including food safety**: Healthier eating activities undertaken under banner of 'Give it a Go' programme; BBC Grub Club activities promoted; healthy food and recipe information made available on SU website; research on healthier eating conducted by undergraduate student; formal links made with UCLan's Food for Nutrition in Health Unit, which brings staff together across UCLan to develop research and curricula; partnership working initiated with Lancashire Trading Standards to produce a 1st year student resource which has a focus on healthy eating and menus.

What methods of communication did you use?

Working group meetings, awaydays, campaigns, events for students, point of sale information to customers.

How did you make the case for action?

The working group came together to produce draft objectives for UCLan to ratify, making a clear case for current practice and actions required – with auditing of current practice against North West Guidelines.

Monitoring and Evaluation

How did you measure impact?

A range of methods including:

- Feedback from staff and students.
- Uptake of Grub Club packs.
- Assessment of changes embedded within procurement process, e.g. related to local produce/food miles, minimising packaging, recycling).
- Presence of clear labelling on sandwiches and in catering outlets.

What were the outcomes / outputs?

- Campaigning on healthy eating topics higher on the agenda.
- Increased number of representatives on working group, e.g. from Sport, Catering, Lecturing and Sustainable Development.
- Links made between healthy eating, physical activity and mental health.
- Customers benefit from changes made to cooked food, e.g. in terms of reduced fat and salt; portion sizes.
- Enhanced inter-service working relationships through consultative process adopted in developing objectives and overseeing implementation of action plan.

Key Learning Points

What were the challenges or barriers?

- Lack of dedicated budget to enable changes to catering environments.
- Lack of time due to nature of staff roles within catering.
- Balancing conflicting views re. portion sizes from external experts (too big) and customer feedback (just right).
- Balancing the aim of providing healthy food options but at the same time needing to attract customers and offer what they want.
- UCLan and SU catering outlets being in competition with each other.

What helped you achieve success?

- Commitment and enthusiasm from those involved from the start to address healthy eating in an holistic way.
- Being realistic about what objectives could be achieved with limited budget and limited time.
- Willingness of UCLan and SU catering/retail to work in partnership to negotiate areas they could work on together.

How did the work contribute to the three key focus areas of healthy universities?

1. Create healthy and sustainable learning, working and living environments

- Customer information on menus, posters, point of sale promoting healthy choices and identifying locally produced products.
- Staff can see healthy options for internal catering options.

2.   Integrate health and sustainability into core business

- Changes to procurement process that relate to food miles, recycling etc.
- Changes to internal catering options for meetings, events etc. to include healthy options menu.
- Changes to methods of cooking, menu design and portion sizes.

3.   Contribute to the health and wellbeing and sustainability of local, regional, national and global communities

- Impact of procurement decisions made at UCLan to increase local providers, thereby impacting positively on the local economy.
- General education/awareness-raising within the university population about healthy eating and making choices available which will influence their decisions as citizens in all these realms.

Thematic Categories

Method		Topic		Population Group	
Campaign / Event	☐	Alcohol /Substance Misuse	☐	Staff	☒
Curriculum	☐	Built Environment	☐	Students	☒
Project	☐	Food / Healthy Eating	☒	Wider Community	☒
Policy / Procedure	☐	Mental Health	☐	Other	☐
Whole System Approach	☒	Physical Activity / Active Transport	☐		
Other	☐	Sexual Health	☐		
		Sustainable Development	☒		
		Tobacco	☐		
		Other	☐		

Contact Details

Name of Organisation	University of Central Lancashire
Contact Name	Sharon Doherty
Email Address	shdoherty@uclan.ac.uk
Links	www.uclan.ac.uk/hu www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/nutrition/index.php www.takeaction-nhs.co.uk www.bbc.co.uk/headroom