

# Healthy college cafeteria

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Eating healthy is made more difficult by the lack of available healthier foods in college canteens yet due to the economic restraints and busy lifestyles of students, the college canteen is often the main place that students eat.

There is a responsibility from our educational institutions to focus on providing healthy, nutritious, reasonably priced foods that ensure that students have healthy eating options.

In the UK, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver has become notorious for his scathing attacks on the food served in schools. A ten-part TV series released in 2005 based in a school, exposed exactly the type of food that was being served (processed food that is high in sugar and fat) and the negative effects on health. His pioneering work has since continued, urging schools to use natural ingredients, local and organic produce, and serve well-balanced meals. He has also succeeded in getting councils to sponsor " a ten-year strategic plan and fund a long-term public campaign to get people back on to a proper diet and empower/persuade (and possibly scare, if needed) the public to make better choices." (My Manifesto)

Awareness Raising; Any significant change in the food served in the college canteens should also go hand in hand with a college funded awareness-raising project. This has taken place in a number of colleges already in the UK and US<sup>2</sup> and could provide students with ideas, recipes, and information about the nutritional and health values of the food that they eat.

Consultation with the students; In making a shift to providing healthier foods for students it is important that they are consulted in order to ascertain what healthy foods would be popular. By running a consultation information can be gathered to help design the new menus.

Skills gap; To provide healthy and nutritious food using natural ingredients

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can often mean that those working in the cafeteria need proper training in food production. Training should be offered to cafeteria staff and their wages should reflect the potential increase in work hours caused by preparing meals with fresh ingredients.

**Sourcing Organic Foods;** Organic foods can appear to be more expensive but often when they are brought in bulk the price goes down significantly. Maybe joining up with other educational institutions in the area to make joint food orders with or looking for sponsorship for the college's healthy food project could ensure that prices stay affordable yet the quality goes up.

**Sourcing Local Foods;** While the food might not be organic, buying food from local producers assures a number of things. It boosts the local economy, it is often cheaper for the buyer as the 'middle person' ( in this case the food distributor) is cut out. Regular orders and establishing a good relationship mean producers listen to their buyers and could in the future ( for example) reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers

**Sourcing Fair Trade Products;** Fairtrade products are often organic and produced by co-operatives therefore ensuring the best price for the farmer. By purchasing these products the college not only supports farmers in the developing world but also indirectly educates students about just and sustainable farming methods and food distribution.