

Petition: P-05-865 Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 5 Mawrth 2019
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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-865

Petition title: Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals

Petition text:

We call upon the Welsh Government to ensure that all Welsh public sector institutions provide at least one plant-based food option on every daily menu to ensure vegans' rights are met and to maximise the ethical, environmental and health benefits of vegan diets.

More people of all ages are making the decision to live vegan, with the number in the UK doubling twice in the last 4 years. More people are also choosing plant-based food for health, environmental and ethical reasons.

Vegans have the same legal protections as people with religious beliefs, because our moral conviction that it is wrong to use and kill non-human animals unnecessarily is protected under law. Service providers have an obligation to provide for vegans and to avoid any discrimination on the grounds of veganism. Sadly, despite this, provision for vegans in the public sector is often lacking, with hospital patients, prisoners and school children often going hungry. The Welsh Government is responsible for ensuring that the Welsh public sector provides for vegans and the proposed legislation would assist in fulfilling that obligation.

Plant-based food can be enjoyed by everyone. The British Dietetic Association recognises that well-planned totally plant-based diets are suitable for every age and life stage. A

substantial body of research has linked plant-based diets with lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, lower rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer.

Plant-based diets are better for the environment and can reduce our food related carbon emissions by up to 50%. The UN has urged a global move towards a meat and dairy free diet for the benefit of our planet, and Wales has the opportunity to lead the way.

Background

Vegan Diet

The Vegan Society [defines veganism](#) as a ‘way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose’. The dietary implication of this is that vegans follow a plant based diet, avoiding all animal products including meat, fish, shellfish, eggs, dairy, and honey.

The main reasons cited for adopting a vegan diet include concern for animal welfare, concerns about the environmental impact and sustainability of non-vegan diets, and the perceived health benefits of vegan diets.

The [NHS advice](#) on following a vegan diet states that, with the right planning and understanding of what makes up a healthy and balanced diet, a vegan diet should be able to provide all the nutrients the body needs, although supplements for certain nutrients such as vitamin B12 may be required. Specific advice for expectant mothers and for babies and children is also provided. The British Dietetic Association [Plant-based diet webpage](#) outlines some sources of nutrients required for a healthy diet which are suitable for vegetarians/vegans.

Veganism in the UK

An [Ipsos MORI survey for the Vegan Society in 2016](#) reported a figure of 542,000 people aged 15+ in Great Britain (1.05% of over 15s) following a vegan diet, an increase of 350% on the [2006 figure of 150,000](#). The BBC reported on the growth of veganism in 2018: [Veganism: Why is it on the up?](#)

Portuguese Legislation

The Portuguese Parliament [approved legislation in March 2017](#) requiring all public sector canteens to provide a vegan option. This followed a petition by the Portuguese Vegetarian Society (Associação Vegetariana Portuguesa) in 2015 which attracted over 15,000 signatures. The legislation includes a clause that allows an exemption for establishments in which there is insufficient demand for the vegan option.

Petitions to the UK Parliament

A similar petition is currently collecting signatures on the UK Parliament website: [Require plant-based options suitable for vegans on public sector menus every day](#). At the time of

writing this briefing it had attracted 21,471 signatures. The UK Government responded on 28 November 2018 stating: ‘Public sector canteens are happy to cater for people with special dietary needs including those eating a vegan diet.’ The petition closes on 13 March 2019.

A similar petition – [Put a VEGAN meal on every school, college, university, hospital and prison menu](#) – ran on the UK Parliament website before it closed in April 2017. It attracted 19,012 signatures. The UK Government responded in December 2016 stating: ‘Individual institutions are responsible for the nutrition of their members and being aware of health, religious, cultural and ethical choices: and doing all they can to facilitate that choice.’

If petitions to the UK Parliament receive 10,000 signatures, the UK Government provides a response. If they reach 100,000 signatures, they are considered for a debate in the UK Parliament.

Welsh Government action

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, wrote to the Committee in relation to this petition on 29 January 2019. She said:

Institutions providing food options within the public sector must be mindful of meeting the demands of their customers, however they are not under any obligation to go further than that required by the law. For example, guidance is available to support the mandatory food and fluid nutrition standards for hospital patients [discussed above]. This guidance stipulates that hospitals must consider the needs of minority groups who require special diets early in the menu planning process. There is a requirement to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that these patient groups can meet their nutritional needs through the provision of appropriate and familiar foods. Special diets refer to cultural or religious needs such as halal or kosher diets. It is recommended that menu planning groups consult patients, local communities and their representatives to confirm their needs.

In the case of this petition it would be a positive step forward for the petitioners to put their case to the decision takers in the various public sector institutions delivering catering services if they feel more should be done, and that this direct engagement and use of guidance will be more beneficial in the long term than further mandation.

The [Healthy Eating in Schools \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#) set out requirements for food and drink provided in schools. The regulations do not make any specific requirement on the provision of vegan options, although the [statutory guidance](#) produced by Welsh Government does outline some ‘practical advice’ on ensuring that pupils following vegetarian or vegan diets receive adequate nutrients, such as ensuring vegan alternatives to milk are provided. The regulations do not apply in certain circumstances, such as when food is brought in by parents or pupils, or when food is provided as part of any medically prescribed dietary requirements.

The [All Wales Nutrition and Catering Standards for Food and Fluid for Hospital Inpatients](#) (PDF 464KB) require that a vegetarian option must be available at each meal, but do not require that a vegan option be provided. Chapter 7 – Special and Personal Diets – states that the standard

hospital menu provided will cater to the needs of vegetarians who eat cheese, eggs, and milk, but that variants of this diet will require planning for individual patient need.

On 29 November 2018 the Welsh Government published [new guidance on food and nutrition for childcare settings](#). On vegan diets, the guidance states that providers should work:

... with parents/carers to devise a suitable menu for the child including foods the child is familiar with at home, and which particular foods are to be avoided e.g. gelatine and rennet. You may need to ask families to provide appropriate foods and seek advice from a dietitian.

National Assembly for Wales action

A similar petition has been before the Committee previously. [P-05-766 Make a Vegan Option Compulsory In Public Canteens](#) ran from July 2017 to January 2018 and collected 118 signatures. The Committee agreed to close the petition 'as it is difficult to see how the Committee can take the petition forward in the absence of contact from the petitioner.' The petition read:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to make including a vegan option obligatory for all public canteens or services in Wales where they have the powers to do so.

The Portuguese Parliament has approved an obligatory vegan option in all public canteens (e.g. schools, universities, prisons, hospitals) – a huge step for vegan catering for all. Over 5% of the population is vegan and growing. A vegan diet is healthier, it conserves resources and protects the planet, above all it's cruelty free. United Nations has called upon us to consume more plant based foods. Animal products are linked to the increase in cancer and heart disease.

Other Assembly action in this area is listed below, although it should be noted that vegan options were not specifically considered:

- Petition [P-04-663 Food in Welsh Hospitals](#) was considered by both the current Committee and its predecessor. The petition called on the Welsh Government to examine the standards of food in hospitals in Wales. The petitioner highlighted several areas in which they felt improvements were needed, including the current level of provision for patients with dietary needs. The Committee closed the petition in October 2017 following consideration of hospital catering and patient nutrition by the Public Accounts Committee (see below), and given the satisfaction expressed by the petitioner.
- The Public Accounts Committee carried out a [inquiry into hospital catering and patient nutrition](#) in 2016, as a follow up to a [previous inquiry](#) by its predecessor Committee in the Fourth Assembly. The [Committee's report \(March 2017\)](#) (PDF 625KB) recommends that the Welsh Government 'monitor whether health boards are recording and meeting the cultural, religious and dietary needs of patients'. The Welsh Government accepted the recommendation, but the Auditor General for Wales then wrote to the Committee expressing concern that the Welsh Government's response may not be a guarantee that the Committee's recommendation will be fully implemented.

- During scrutiny of the Bill that became the *Public Health (Wales) Act 2017*, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's [Stage 1 report](#) (PDF 962KB) recommended that the then Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans, examine the potential to introduce measures to tackle obesity and other priority public health issues, including 'making provision for a statutory basis for nutritional standards in early years and care home settings and hospitals'. The Minister [accepted the principle of the recommendation](#) (PDF 186KB) and confirmed that work was underway on the issue of nutritional standards in early years and care home setting (see the guidance on food and nutrition for childcare settings discussed above).

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.