

Petition: P-05-766 Make a Vegan Option Compulsory in Public Canteens

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Gorffennaf 2017
Petitions Committee | 11 July 2017

Research Briefing:

Petition number: [P-05-766](#)

Petition title: **Make a Vegan Option Compulsory In Public Canteens**

Text of petition: 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.

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 [‘Vegetarian Diets’ Fact Sheet](#) produced by the British Dietetic Association outlines some sources of nutrients required for a healthy diet which are suitable for vegetarians/vegans.

Veganism in the UK and Wales

The petitioner states that 5% of the population is vegan, however it is unclear from where this figure has been obtained. The most recent [‘Food and You’ survey](#) by the Food Standards Agency found that fewer than 1% of respondents said they were vegan. This 1% figure is similar to the UK-wide findings of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey reported on the [NHS website](#), as well as those of a [2016 Ipsos MORI poll](#) of 9,933 people over the age of 15 in England, Scotland and Wales. However the number of vegans does seem to be increasing, at a UK-wide level at least. The 2016 Ipsos MORI study reported a figure of 542,000 people aged 15+ (1.05% of over 15s) following a vegan diet, an increase of 350% on the [2006 figure of 150,000](#).

A [similar petition](#) to this one ran for 6 months on the UK Parliament website, attracting 19,012 signatures by its closure on 3 April 2017. This was short of the 100,000 needed to be considered for debate in Parliament, but enough to warrant a response from the UK Government, which began by stating that:

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.

The response went on to outline the regulations surrounding the food provision in hospitals, prisons, schools, and universities, and concluded by stating that the Government recognises that the issue of diet is complex, with many influencing factors which the Government does not aim to undermine.

Portuguese Legislation

The Portuguese Parliament approved a new [law](#) on 3 March 2017 that will require all public canteens to provide a strict vegetarian option (‘strict’ meaning ‘containing no animal products’, i.e., vegan). This follows a petition by the Portuguese Vegetarian Society (Associação Vegetariana Portuguesa) in 2015 which attracted over 15,000 signatures and was discussed in the parliament in 2016. The law also includes a clause that allows an exemption for establishments in which there is insufficient demand for the vegan option. A spokesperson for the Portuguese Vegetarian Society [reported](#) that this is the first law in Portugal to explicitly mention vegetarianism.

Welsh Government action

The [Healthy Eating in Schools \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#) set out requirements for food and drink provided in schools by local authorities or schools. These 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 pupils following vegetarian or vegan diets receive adequate nutrients, such as ensuring vegan alternatives to milk are provided. It should also be noted that these 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 Welsh Government launched the [All Wales Nutrition and Catering Standards for Food and Fluid for Hospital Inpatients](#) in October 2011. These Standards require that a vegetarian option must be available at each meal, but do not require that a vegan option be provided. It is noted in Chapter 7, ‘Special and Personal Diets’, 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.

National Assembly for Wales action

A [petition on Food in Welsh Hospitals](#) was initially considered by the Fourth Assembly Petitions Committee, and has been considered by the current Committee on several occasions (the most recent being on 17 January 2017). While not specifically concerning vegan options, this 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 that improvements were needed, including the current level of provision for patients with dietary needs.

The Public Accounts Committee carried out a [short inquiry into Hospital Catering and Patient Nutrition](#) in late 2016, as a follow up to a [previous inquiry](#) by the Fourth Assembly Public Accounts Committee. The Committee’s report was published in March of this year, and included a recommendation that the Welsh Government develop a set of questions to be included in both standardised nursing documentation and future patient surveys to “monitor whether health boards are recording and meeting the cultural, religious and dietary needs of patients”. The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation in their response to the Committee in May 2017, 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.

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.