



THE  
BUCHANAN  
INSTITUTE

# Savour:

food waste reduction  
strategies improving  
sustainability at  
university cafes



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# Content

Executive Summary  
Introduction

## BACKGROUND

1. The problem
2. Our mission
3. What is currently being done

## STAKEHOLDERS

4. Edinburgh University Student Association
5. Accommodation, Catering and Events
6. Outreach Plan
7. Further outreach and stakeholders

## RESEARCH METHODS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Measure food waste
7. Schemes implemented at other universities
8. Redistribution
9. Feasibility of our food waste reduction recommendations

Future research recommendations

Bibliography

# Executive Summary

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This policy proposal sets out to fill the gaps in the current university policy regarding food waste. It first defines the flaws in the current management of food waste, based on research conducted throughout this academic year. A list of guidelines are then set out based on previous academic research and policies from other universities. The most essential of these is establishing a system of waste tracking across university campus. Currently there is little to no data with regards to the amount of food waste the university produces. Data needs to be collected, analysed, and made transparent to students. Furthermore, the policy lists further strategies that can be implemented in light of data collected, to reduce overall food waste amounts.

# Introduction

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Food waste and sustainability is an issue that the University of Edinburgh has acknowledged, however, in practice there is little done to prevent the waste of food from University sites such as the cafes throughout University owned buildings. The university has an aim ‘to support staff and student led projects and research to enhance sustainability at the University’, such as this one. In alignment with this goal we aim to create an actionable policy to address the issue of food waste within the University of Edinburgh. Current handling of food waste is incompatible with the student body ethos at the University and when rectified will have benefits environmentally, economically and ethically.

# Background

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## The problem

- About 47,000 to 110,000 tonnes of edible food gets wasted from retail every year in the UK (FareShare, from WRAP, Surplus food redistribution in the UK 2015-17, 2018)
- In 2013, an estimated 1.35 million tonnes of food and drink in Scotland was wasted (Zero Waste Scotland, 2016)
- Numbers for the University of Edinburgh are unclear, and there is no direct recording of food waste from catering or university cafes.
- Otherwise edible food that has gone by the expiration date is thrown out. However, the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability is working towards a food sharing scheme addressing this issue.
- “Most business do not realise how much food waste costs them. For example, a 240 litre wheeled bin filled with food waste costs around £240 for food purchase costs and waste disposal alone. One food waste bin weekly over the year could potentially cost a business more than £12,000.” (Zero Waste Scotland, 2016)

## Our mission

Our mission is to find and recommend strategies that will limit food waste and improve sustainability in order to reduce the food in university cafes that goes past their expiration date.

In addition, we would like to partner with SRS to form these strategies into a Sustainability Award for university cafes, using a similar framework to the existing awards for offices.

## **What is currently being done**

- Edinburgh University Student's Association (EUSA) has implemented a food sharing system in collaboration with Shrub Swap and Reuse Hub (SHRUB), but with mixed success. Their communication with SHRUB remains inconsistent and not all their food waste is picked up on time. EUSA is currently looking to have a more consistent partner for food waste pick-up, preferably a larger organisation. They are also open and interested in other ways to improve the sustainability of their practices in relation to food waste.
- The Department of Social Sustainability and Responsibility (SRS) is working towards improving sustainability on campus and has previously worked with EUSA on their food waste reduction project. The SRS is currently looking into the possibilities of putting in place a food sharing system on campus.
- The University of Edinburgh has committed to sustainable food practices through the Good Food Policy. Highlights concerning food waste include:
  - Recycling of coffee grounds into biofuels, becoming a “coffee neutral” university.
  - 100% of food waste in University outlets recycled using anaerobic digestion.
  - At the industry level: We met with Michael Groves, the CEO of Topolytics, a waste analytics company operating internationally, to understand what industry professionals are doing to address food waste at a larger scale. We learned that weighing waste and then using this data to improve supply chains

is the main way that Topolytics decreases waste. We think that the university could benefit from implementing this into their practices. See recommendations section for more details on this.

- The Scottish Government says that they are “taking action to reduce and recycle food waste” and their goal is to “reduce all food waste arising in Scotland by 33% by 2025” (The Scottish Government)

## Stakeholders

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### **EUSA**

Our main stakeholder at the beginning of the initiative are university cafes and restaurants, run by the Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA). Our primary point of contact was Georgie, the VP Community within the EUSA. We held several meetings to discuss our cooperation with EUSA and gain access to the research they carried. Georgie was very responsive and communicative and shared the gathered data. However, we found significant gaps in their research.

### **Accommodation, Catering and Events**

We have also reached out to the Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE) for the University of Edinburgh, who are in charge of catering for student accommodation and events. Unfortunately, we were unable to get in contact with them nor derive any data.

## **Outreach plan**

At the beginning, we are aiming solely to the University cafes and restaurants.

However, in the long run we have a plan to outreach further. Having established a position on the campus, we aim to extend our cooperation to Honours Catering and Edinburgh First, the official catering deliverers at the university campus.

## **Further outreach and stakeholders**

We have also gathered several groups of further possible stakeholders. The first includes food places already pursuing sustainable practices. We made this choice because we believe that at the beginning restaurants and cafes already taking sustainable action will be most likely to participate in the scheme. Examples include the Union of genius, Milk Café Bar, Hanks Sandwich Bar, Hula Juice Bar, Organic Delicious Café and Brochan.

Another group are cafes in museums and galleries established in Edinburgh. Some of them, for example Contini, already peruse sustainable action. We believe that others, including among the others, Museum Brasserie, Balcony Cade and Tower Restaurant, could be interested in getting involved as well.

Another group are popular student spots around the campus. Students are increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability; therefore, we believe that these spots would be interested in joining the scheme to attract more consumers. Examples of members of this group include “coffee boxes” such as Cheap Shot and cafes, for example, Cult, Machina Espresso, Brew Lab and Press Coffee.

# Research methods

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We conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders to gather information regarding current university efforts to address food waste. This allowed us to get a general sense of the level of commitment of the university to reducing food waste and to gain an understanding of the flaws in the current system.

When we initially began our research, we hoped to find concrete data regarding the amount of waste the university produces and to use this data as a starting point to determine what else needs to be done. However, a major finding through interviews was that this data does not yet exist. This made continued qualitative research the best option for investigating food waste reduction strategies at the university.

In addition to conducting interviews with stakeholders within the university, we also contacted other UK universities to see what they are doing well. This gave us insight into methods of decreasing food waste that have been put to practice in similar settings to the University of Edinburgh. By tailoring our research to universities, we were able to gain insight into the most applicable forms food waste reduction to a university setting.

Furthermore, we met with local stakeholders such as SHRUB to explore other possible methods that are applied locally. This gave us an idea of how food waste is addressed in the greater community of Edinburgh and to what extent these strategies are relevant to the University. Finally, examining current research in the field

allowed us to find out scope of the issue, gain a basis of knowledge from research that has already been conducted, as well as assess which methods are most effective and can be implemented at the University.

Hearing from an industry professional in charge of Topolytics provided crucial insight into what practices are being used today and what works for businesses. We were able to learn what businesses see as beneficial and gained confirmation weighing waste works as a method of food waste reduction when out to practice.

# Recommendations

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## Measure

- Weigh and record all food waste from all university cafes, either when thrown out at the cafe or when collected.
- This data can then be used to adjust how much food the business purchases.
- Be transparent about this data

## Schemes implemented at other universities

- Log all unsold/thrown out food in order to measure costs (done at Napier).
- Sell leftover/soon to expire foods
- Friday cafe to sell leftover food (done at University of Dundee).
- Mark food that is soon to expire to urge sales.
- Put soon to expire foods at a designated spot to urge sales.

- “50 at 50”: sell certain foods at 50% off 50 minutes before closing time to sell foods that would otherwise be wasted (done at UCL)
- Include Cafes and Catering into the Sustainability Awards

## **Redistribution**

In order to save a maximum amount of food from being wasted, a redistribution scheme could be introduced to complement the pricing mechanisms. Such food waste reduction strategies are already being implemented by the University of Oxford that donates leftover meals to charities, and the University College London where students redistribute food from the UCL cafes to homeless people.

A similar strategy could easily be implemented at the University of Edinburgh as the mechanisms for food distribution are already in place. The SHRUB Co-operative, a local social enterprise, has been running a successful Food Sharing project for six years. Additionally, platforms such as Olio or Too Good To Go connect businesses with customers and allow them to advertise their unsold food on their apps. Food offered on the Olio app is always free. Businesses add their unsold food to the app which users can then request and collect. Too Good To Go has the advantage that it allows businesses to make a small extra profit on their unsold food by offering it for a reduced price (usually around £3). Businesses specify on the app how many food collections they will need on the day and when the food should be collected. Users pay online and pick up the food later. This system encourages users to only sign up for collections they will turn up for. Too Good to Go currently has 522,456 users in the UK and is partnering with 1,495 businesses across the country, more than 30 in Edinburgh alone.

If the UoE cafes would sign up to either of these schemes or enter a business partnership with SHRUB, this would eliminate the need to reach out to local charities and recruit volunteers to distribute the food.

The potential of a food redistribution strategy is already evidenced by SHRUB Food Sharing's partnership with the Edinburgh University Student Association (EUSA). Volunteers pick up leftovers at the EUSA New Amphion from Monday to Saturday. Because every business that chooses to work with SHRUB is assigned a business facilitator who acts as a communicator between the business, SHRUB and the volunteers, food pickups can be tailored to the needs to the participating business. For example, because the New Amphion requires two different pickup times for hot food and leftover bread and pastries, two volunteers are sent to ensure none of it goes to waste.

Although we acknowledge that any system relying on volunteers will not be as reliable as one that employs paid workers, we believe that any kg of food collected would benefit the business offering the food as it would not have to pay for the waste nor the volunteers collecting it.

## **Feasibility of our food waste reduction recommendations**

Savour has brainstormed several possible changes that could be implemented to sustainably reduce EUSA's food waste. This document describes how they could be carried out.

Firstly, we advocate a formal relationship to be created between EUSA and Savour to ensure prosperous and durable changes and an easy exchange of information and data.

**1. *Incorporate weighing food waste into the job description of EUSA cafés and cafeteria staff***

This would encourage the staff to take a greater interest in food waste and thus help reduce waste on a daily basis and track it to improve the EUSA waste system. This would also save the university money as waste is paid to be disposed of per bag. To do this staff must be mandatorily taught how to handle the scales and a protocol by which to measure the wasted food.

**2. *Strengthen links between EUSA and food-sharing organisations such as SHRUB, Olio and Too Good To Go***

This will forge stronger links with the community and groups that are substantiating environmentally sustainable paths. Furthermore, though working with the community-led cooperative SHRUB based in Edinburgh, food can be disseminated to students or the homeless for free. To enable this EUSA would have to have some ‘facilitators’ (volunteers) to bring the food to a pick-up point or drop it off at a chosen location such as a homeless shelter.

**3. *Other strategies to stop good food from being wasted***

**3.1 *Friday food shop – selling food before the weekend that will go off at a discounted price as practised at Dundee University.***

This could easily work if it was advertised and certain cafés were designated to be a Friday shop.

3.2 *Mark last day food to show that it is going off e.g. 'eat me this is my last day'*

This would be easy to achieve if were stickers printed, or there could be a separate shelf for this food, like in supermarkets.

3.3 *50/50 programme – 50% off food 50 minutes before closing time*

Use advertisements to ensure all the reduced food goes.

3.4 *Leave food in a communal fridge for everyone to enjoy perhaps in accommodation buildings or libraries, as being trialled at Glasgow University.*

3.5 *A formal relationship between EUSA and Savour would enable these connections to be made and changes monitored to ensure the most productive changes.*

## Future research recommendations

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Because of our choice of research methods, we were not able to gather quantitative data regarding food wasted, nor gain insight into the types of food waste incurred around all sites of the university. In addition, our research ended up being cafe-focused because of the stakeholders we were able to get in touch with. With the collection of data by the university and increased transparency, these issues will become less prominent in future years. We recommend that groups in future years

attempt to access all sites handling food around University campus, including catering for accommodation, catered events, and shops around campus in order to gain a more well-rounded and thorough view of the issue of food waste at the University.

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