

23 Nov. 18

## HEPCOM Community Partner Projects - UK

### Project : Getting a healthy lunch at college

#### Setting: - Further Education College (16-19 years)

#### Introduction:

The objective of the HEPCOM project is to enhance and increase obesity prevention amongst children and young people across Europe through the dissemination of resources, practice tools and case-study experience. During the initial needs-analysis phase of the project, the University of Brighton, as the UK partner, noted that whilst there has been considerable activity around school age obesity prevention there are few resources available for the 16+ age group. The Further Education (FE) college age, 16-19 years, offers a critical opportunity to prepare students for the next transition to the fuller level of independence that tends to come as young people move away from the family home to University and/or shared accommodation. However, unlike under 16 year education, for the 16+ age there are no formal opportunities within the FE college curriculum for such 'life skills' tuition, or Personal, social, health education (PSHE). There are no universally taken courses and although FE colleges usually have short periods of 'tutor group' time each week, tutors tend to have multiple groups and a full agenda of issues to raise in that time.

For most students, the move from school to FE College represents a significant shift in levels of autonomy around money, time and food as well as in patterns of study and expectations of self-directed learning. Our qualitative research conducted with students in Further Education (FE) colleges as part of the HEPCOM project indicated that students regarded this new found autonomy with ambivalence, particularly in relation to the college environment and opportunities for healthy eating or being physically active.

Our research indicated that FE college students' lunch-time food choices were driven by the need for food to be quick to buy, portable and good value-for-money (Shukru, 2015). Student's greatest priority was being able to eat with their group of friends, often while walking around as there was not always sufficient seating areas for groups. Food need to be 'grab and go' as the lunch-time was short (40-45 minutes) and students did not want to spend it queuing for food and/or seating. Meal-deals were frequently cited as the best way of meeting these needs, whether from local shops or from college canteens. Students acknowledged that meal-deals tended to steer them towards choosing the more expensive items within the deal, such as confectionary or sugar-sweetened drinks, so that they achieved perceived value-for-money rather than reflecting other considerations such as health. When asked about healthy eating, students struggled to articulate what healthy eating looked like beyond '5-a-day', fruit, vegetables and salad. Yet consultations with students, such as 'Student Voice' surveys frequently report that students want more 'healthy food'; (Sherriff, 2015) .

#### Use of HEPCOM tools

Many of the EU funded projects on the HEPCOM platform refer to using Whole school approaches, (eg HEPS, SHE tools) whereby the education sector sets out to increase knowledge and skills around healthy living but also provides a setting and environment which encourages healthy choices. An underlying principle in applying Whole School Approaches is the involvement of students in the decision making and co-production of knowledge and practice. This community project was planned with reference to the Shape Up Evaluation Tool kit from the HEPCOM platform which provides specific pointers on the involvement of young people as follows:



- A dialogue-oriented and participatory approach, focussing on the relationship between professionals and young people where young peoples’ understanding of health represent the main drivers of the project
- Young people as Active Change Agents
- A holistic understanding of health- such that healthy food incorporates not only nutritional aspects but also educational aesthetic social and commercial elements
- Application of IVAC approach – the importance of young peoples’ Investigations, Visions, and their Actions in order to facilitate health promoting Changes.

The ‘Shape Up’ evaluation tool kit also highlights the need to undertake some baseline survey

*Main Objective of the project:* Work towards finding ways to make it easier for students to achieve a healthy lunch at college which also meets student’s requirements of being portable, quick to buy and value-for-money.

*Secondary objective:* Enhance student’s nutritional literacy so they know more about how to put ‘healthy eating’ into practice (*It’s more than just salads*).

### Organisation

Project Team at FE College with: students, welfare lead, catering team, interested teacher, City council healthy catering coordinator, Jamie Oliver Foundation representative.

	Action	Who	What is involved
Project team at FE college	Contributing to all aspects of formative development and testing	FE college staff and students University staff	Regular task oriented meetings, reviewing draft tools and approach
Consultation group	Reviewing materials	Wider pool of stakeholders Interested others with relevant expertise	email consultation, one or two project overview meetings,

University of Brighton HEPCOM Project Team.

### Method:

Participatory action research was carried out with students, alongside partnership working with caterers and other stakeholders.

Year 1 students union and interested students were invited to attend a participatory workshop to explore ideas for a healthy meal deal offer in the canteen and to discuss how to promote healthy nutrition to students (see appendix 1 for detail).

- There was broad agreement that any healthy meal deal should be ‘grab and go’.
- Students identified that the drink in existing meal deals was redundant because most students bring their own water bottles into college which they fill up from a water fountain.
- Students thought the college canteen could make more of being able to offer something which could not be provided by the local supermarkets, namely hot, fresh food.
- Small pots of hot food, eg curry in a pot, hot panini’s, perhaps small portions of some of the main meals currently served, but with the option of additional snack- type items to go with them as the meal deal were suggested.
- Based on the discussion, the group proposed a possible healthy meal deal could be a mini-meal + F&V + accompaniment for £3.00

Existing meal deals tend to steer students towards choosing sugary drinks as they are reluctant to pay for water. Removing drinks from the college meal-deal could facilitate healthier choices. This work pre-dated the decision by the UK government to bring in a sugar levy on drinks high in sugar<sup>1</sup>. The Welsh Assembly (cited in HEPS) have previously proposed that snack food sold in schools should have a clear nutritional benefit, ie provide nutrients rather than just calories. Many soft drinks contain only sugar and no other nutrients (so called ‘empty calories’), so a meal-deal without soft drinks represents a significant shift in a healthier direction.

Outputs from the workshop were shared with the caterers and some general principles for the new meal deal drawn up by the University of Brighton, in consultation with other stakeholders, as below:



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## General Principles of HEPCOM project meal-deal

- a) Take sugary drinks out of meal deal and include fruit instead
- b) Meal deal to provide at least 2 portions of fruit & vegetables.
- c) Meal-deal to provide around 500 calories so it really is a 'meal', with plenty of fibre and minimum use of salt.

As with any 'meal-deal' the combination should be cheaper than buying each item individually. The caterers proposed to offer a soup based hot meal deal, priced competitively with their other food offers.

Soup+ large bread + fruit £2.00  
Soup + sandwich/wrap/bagel + fruit £3.00



The caterer's suggestion was taken back to the students at the second workshop for comment, and the students union then took responsibility for devising the promotion strategy.

Students felt that promotion should be as a 'hot meal deal' not a 'healthy meal deal'. Students promoted the new offer through a Tasting Stall with "soup shots" (small cups of soup) to taste-test and vote on different flavours at the launch. This coincided with a week long 'sugar smart' activity being held with the City Council.



The most popular soup flavour was vegetable and lentil, with spicy sweet potato and butternut squash a close second. Opinion was divided about the parsnip and ginger; this very seasonal soup made using 'wonky but beautiful' parsnips and a Jamie Oliver recipe was appreciated by students who liked ginger but a challenge for others.

### Feedback

The Students Union representatives conducted short interviews with 21 randomly selected students in the canteen. The majority of the students interviewed who bought food in the canteen liked the soup meal deals because they were good value. Opinion was fairly equally divided about the specific action of taking the drink out of the meal deal and replacing with fruit and whether this should be extended to apply to other college meal deals. A third thought it was good idea and some referred to using the water fountain, a third preferred to keep the drink in the meal deal, but a further third suggested that there should be choice of fruit or drink.

We are continuing to develop this project idea further in our School of Health Sciences research programme.



## Appendix 1. Detail of the participatory workshop

The session opened with an activity designed to generate engagement in the topic area and elicit students' conceptualisations of health (Buijs *et al.*, 2014). Students were asked to think about at least two things that were 'healthy' and; two things that were 'unhealthy' about the lunches they and their friends typically have for lunch when they are at college. This was written on 'post-its' and stuck onto a flipchart and used to initiate discussion. A variety of meal deals from local supermarkets and the canteen were placed around the room intended to be use in a planned activity exploring how we assess the 'healthiness' of lunches, however the workshop was cut short by students needing to return to class, so they were given to students as a 'thank you' for their participation instead. Below is a summary of the main points emerging from the discussion which was checked by the students who participated as being a fair representation, and used for developing further in the next workshop.

### Feedback from healthy : unhealthy exercise

Healthy	Unhealthy
3 x Sandwiches, including salad filling 2x Water 2 x Fruit 2 x Bringing snacks from home eg apple, dried mango 2 x Bringing lunch prepared at home, eg pasta 2 x Balance Carbohydrates + fruit + vegetables	4 x chips (fatty and salty foods) 3 x Biscuits/ chocolate, filling up on cheap multipacks from supermarket Eating crisps, chocolate as snack instead of lunch Canteen has very fried food Pasta with no meat or vegetables Pizza Sugary drinks and energy drinks Eating only carbs or a lot of sugar

Our previous research identified that students wanted a lunch which was 'grab and go' so that they did not use their short lunch break queuing, and had the flexibility to eat it where they chose. After reporting back on this we then asked students 'what would a healthy, grab and go lunch for up to £3.00 from the on-site facility look like?'

*Based on the discussion, a possible healthy £3.00 meal deal could be a mini-meal + Fruit or Vegetable + accompaniment*

	Mini meal +	fruit or veg piece +	accompaniment
For example (	Meal portion Eg curry and rice Burrito Meal in a soup (homemade) High quality thick bread sandwich	Piece fruit/ a carrot etc Or a portion, eg salad spoonfull popped on top of mini meal	Such as Small nan, pitta Chutney and mini popadom Crudities and hummus
<i>Served in</i>	<i>paper pot</i>	Hand held or in pot	Hand held, in cup or in paper
<i>Unit price when sold separately</i>	<i>£2.50</i>	40/50p?	40/50p
<i>Meal deal saving</i>	<i>£3.30/40 - £3.00 Saving 30p</i>		

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health England. (2014). Sugar Reduction: responding to the challenge. PHE publications

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/324043/Sugar\\_Reduction\\_Responding\\_to\\_the\\_Challenge\\_26\\_June.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324043/Sugar_Reduction_Responding_to_the_Challenge_26_June.pdf)



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