



## Are nutrition students equipped for the future? The knowledge and barriers of using sustainable diets

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Nutrition professionals are important stakeholders in sustainable food systems with necessary skills to promote the connection between health, food production, environment, culture, and economics. Yet, there is limited research on how nutrition professionals can further this agenda and their skills<sup>(1)</sup>.

While higher education institutions are increasingly recognising the importance of teaching sustainability, e.g. in medical sciences<sup>(2)</sup>, there still exists a gap in the literature detailing the pedagogy of sustainability issues for undergraduate nutrition students. Additionally, most research has been conducted outside of the UK<sup>(1)</sup>. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the knowledge of sustainable diets and the perceived barriers to using sustainable diets by final year (Level 6) nutrition students on Association for Nutrition (AfN) accredited degrees.

This study ascertained environmental and sustainable food literacy through an online questionnaire based on a modification of the Nutrition Environmental Literacy Evaluation Instrument (ELEI)<sup>(3,4)</sup> and through interviews on Skype or face-to-face on Liverpool John Moores University premises in 2019. Students were recruited through AfN programme leader e-newsletters, university affiliated student nutrition societies and Twitter. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (KruskalWallis, Jonckheere-Terpstra, independent t test, Spearman, Pearson Correlations). Qualitative data were analysed using the six-step approach to thematic analysis (5).

The questionnaire responses (n = 51) and student interviews (n = 6) represented seventeen AfN accredited undergraduate courses (34% of AfN accredited universities in 2019). The majority (76%) of students stated they had some content pertaining to sustainable diets throughout their degree.

Students were predominantly environmentally literate however, mean score was just under 50%. Students had fragmented understanding of sustainable diets, focusing on environmental aspects and listed lack of knowledge, monetary and location as barriers preventing them from adopting sustainable practices in the present and future. There was agreement on the vital role nutritionists have in advocating for sustainable diets in the future and the need for more education in nutrition courses at universities. Students suggested holistic integration of the social, environmental, health aspects of sustainable food system into nutrition degrees.

To integrate sustainability into their future practice more consistently, nutrition students require more holistic sustainability education and knowledge.

### References

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