



## Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

### Call for Evidence: Shaping our education strategy

#### The Vegan Society Response

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This is public evidence, and we waive confidentiality.

#### 0. Overarching Themes

The Vegan Society notes that, in law and treaty, we must always give due regard to the protected characteristic of belief, both philosophical as well as religious, in education. This includes people holding the belief of veganism, which is recognised as a protected philosophical belief under law in Wales (EHCR 1950, Equality Act 2010, Postle 2020) and in Scotland, England and N. Ireland law also.

Therefore, health-care educator and student training continual professional development (CPD) courses need to be reviewed to ensure that they fully include, teach and assess veganism and the rights of vegans.

The Vegan Society has evidence of significant knowledge gaps of healthcare professionals, leaving them unable to accurately and appropriately advise and support vegans.

In our 2024 survey of over 300 vegans using NHS services across the UK in 2021-2024 (The Vegan Society 2024b), well over half (59%) reported negative experience with NHS healthcare professionals. Only one sixth (15%) of respondents had exclusively positive experiences with NHS staff, with others having 'neutral' or 'mixed' experiences.

Vegans found 'limited' or 'very limited' ability to tailor advice and support to their needs with around half of GPs (52%), nurses (54%), and pharmacists (48%) and around two-fifths of midwives (43%), health visitors (38%) and dietitians (40%).

The main issues reported were that healthcare professionals did not have a working knowledge of veganism, and the care planning considerations for vegan service users. For example, one service user noted, "There is not enough understanding of what is in meds and how to prescribe to vegans".

A minority of vegans also reported experiencing judgement, hostility, or rudeness from NHS healthcare professionals. One service user found that it was, "Very difficult to overcome prejudice and professional's perception of veganism" (The Vegan Society 2024a).



Everyone is entitled to equitable respect and quality of care when using the NHS, and other health-care services, including vegans. Thus, significant improvements are needed to the training of healthcare professionals, and their educators, to end discrimination and uphold the Public Sector Equality Duty.



## 1. Educational Quality

The Vegan Society notes that sustainable, sound nutrition is the foundation to public health now and for future generations. The available body of evidence suggests that insufficient training in sustainable, well-planned whole-foods-centred plant-based diets is leading to serious public health harms (Henderson & Sampson 2023). We estimate this could cost NHS Wales over £300 million per year, based upon research in England. This shortfall in training also impairs person-centred care, as people seeking nutritious plant-based food in health-care settings are too often facing barriers and insufficient provision, and under-nutrition. All healthcare professionals need to know how to work closely with Registered Dietitians to support these needs.

The Vegan Society notes that healthcare education and professional development must pay due regard to the Equality Act 2010 in all settings, and to the Public Sector Equality Duty where relevant. As a philosophical belief which qualifies for protection under the Equality Act, veganism must attract equivalent protections to other religious and philosophical beliefs. Thus, all health-care professionals need a sound grounding in vegan-suitable care, including issues of the use of animals in medication and safety testing, as well as nutrition.



## 2. Curriculum and Pedagogy

The Vegan Society notes that sound nutrition is foundational across the whole healthcare sector. This should include sustainable, healthy plant-based and vegan-suitable diets. Yet, the evidence shows that there are significant knowledge gaps and misconceptions amongst most healthcare professional specialisms – including the most directly involved group, Registered Dietitians – about plant-based diets.

A large majority of qualified Dietitians correctly understand that well-planned plant-based diets can be appropriate across all ages and life-stages (76%), as affirmed by professional dietetic bodies including the British Dietetic Association (BDA 2021). The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has re-stated:

"It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics that, in adults, appropriately planned vegetarian and vegan dietary patterns can be nutritionally adequate and can offer long-term health benefits such as improving several health outcomes associated with cardiometabolic diseases. ..

"As leaders in evidence-based nutrition care, RDNs (Registered Dietetic Nutritionist) and NDTRs (Registered Nutrition and Dietetics Technicians) should aim to support the development and facilitation of vegetarian and vegan dietary patterns and access to nutrient-dense plant-based meals. Promoting a nutrient-balanced vegetarian dietary pattern on both individual and community scales may be an effective tool for preventing and managing many diet-related conditions." (JAND 2009, 2016, 2025).

Yet, nearly half of qualified Dietitians surveyed by The Vegan Society (The Vegan Society 2024a), expressed disproportionate nutritional concerns about whole-foods plant-based diets (48%). The Vegan Society note that the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS 2019-2023) shows that only 4% of adults achieve the healthy dietary fibre intake, and this lack can lead to significant health problems. Whole foods plant-based diets are, in contrast, rich in dietary fibre. This dissonance - Dietitians understand that healthy plant-based diets are feasible, yet perceive a disproportionate risk of malnutrition – highlights the degree of confusion amongst Dietitians. Dietitians need to confidently support service users to achieve well-planned plant-based diets suitable for their own circumstances.

Many Dietitians reported that they had knowledge gaps in how to advise vegan patients around basic nutritional topics including meeting their protein and micronutrient needs. In another survey, a large majority of Dietitians held incorrect beliefs about plant protein. Around three-quarters (75%) of Registered Dietitians did not know that essential amino acids intake can be spread over each day (Metoudi et al. 2025) as they circulate in our blood for 6-12 hours. Thus, adequate and sufficiently varied plant protein intake over a day can meet fully meet our protein needs.

These are highly significant knowledge gaps and misconceptions, which must be thoroughly addressed via pedagogy. To ensure all Registered Dietitians can confidently and correctly advise service users and other health-care colleagues on vegan-suitable and plant-based diets, plant-based nutrition must be a core component of dietetics education and training.

### Plant-Based Nutrition: Further Evidence of Unmet Training Needs

The Vegan Society notes that research suggests a large majority (79%) of Registered Dietitians feel they have insufficient training. Most (58%) feel there are insufficient evidence-based whole-foods plant-based diets resources available to them. This is despite a majority of Dietitians surveyed (57%) having a postgraduate degree. This is evidence of urgent need for curriculum development,



continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, and accessible resources on plant-based nutrition (Metoudi et al. 2025).

On average, whole-foods plant-based diets were ranked 4th in importance of fourteen dietary strategies for managing some leading non-communicable diseases. Thus, whole-foods plant-based diets are generally understood as being clinically relevant, but may not yet be appropriately prioritised in practice and teaching (Metoudi et al., 2025).

In The Vegan Society's 2024 survey of 186 dietitians, only about a quarter (26%) felt 'very informed' in how to adapt their practice to support vegan service users.

A sizeable minority (over 15%) indicated they were 'not at all confident' or 'not very confident' adapting their practice to support patients following a vegan diet, across in-patient and out-patient settings. Yet, this professional skill is required by the Public Sector Equality Duty, and to avoid potentially unlawful indirect discrimination against vegans.

In-patient Dietitians reported lower confidence adapting their practice. Additional barriers arise from other healthcare professionals of in-patient multidisciplinary teams. In particular, doctors and nurses who hold unjustified negative or inaccurate beliefs about vegan diets can create barriers to effective plant-based dietetic interventions. These misconceptions amongst other healthcare practitioners can be addressed by more comprehensive, vegan-inclusive training across healthcare specialisms.

Some quotes about healthcare professional university training illustrated these needs for improvement in course planning, delivery and assessment:

“As a student not taught about vegan diets so knowledge about dietary interventions not there”

“Lack of education during training on how to support vegan patients/vegan diets”

“In my training education on vegan diets was not only limited but not well-researched or compassionate” (The Vegan Society 2024a).

About one third (33 %) of Dietitians felt they receive insufficient support in their workplace when advising on, advocating and implementing whole-foods plant-based diets (The Vegan Society 2024a). This indicates that educators should both deliver content knowledge, and also, skills for advocacy, institutional change, and inter-professional practice as plant-based nutrition may be novel to or contested by colleagues (Metoudi et al. 2025). Healthcare professionals need to be able to confidently overcome such barriers.

### **The Vegan Society Recommendations**

The Vegan Society is a co-author of, “Reaping the Benefits of PlantRich Diets: The Ten Point Plan” (Foodrise, Plant-Based Health Professionals et al. 2025a & b), with 48 other healthcare, food, farming, sustainability and allied organisations. This sets out affordable, cost-effectively and publicly popular plans for realising the wealth of benefits, solutions and opportunities to the UK offered by plant-rich diets and food systems. Two key asks of this Ten Point Plan particularly relevant to healthcare education in Wales are: Improve training for health and food professionals in regard to healthy plant-rich foods; Update, reform and apply the Eatwell Guide dietary guidelines.

Specifically, The Vegan Society recommend that all concerned ensure that all Dietetics and other healthcare training and continuing professional development (CPD) courses:



1. Cover veganism as a protected philosophical belief when discussing protected characteristics, and ethical and religious diets, so that practitioners can meet their professional requirements including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and equality, diversity and inclusion;
2. Incorporate modules on sustainable diets with explicit coverage of whole-foods plant-based nutrition;
3. Address key misconceptions (e.g. around whole-foods plant-based protein, and micronutrients) via evidence-based teaching, and practical workshops (e.g. meal planning, nutrient adequacy) to increase support across all health-care specialisations;
4. Ensure availability of up-to-date, open-access resources on plant-based nutrition for later reference.

**Ensure all Dietetics courses:**

5. Embed teaching on advocacy and workplace change to increase support for plant-based nutrition in clinical, institutional and community settings to support Dietitians' ability to act;
6. Include content on affordability, accessibility, cultural adaptability of plant-based diets (e.g., for low-income households, Global Majority community diets, time-constrained contexts, belief-based needs) in varied settings (community, rural, underserved) to so that future practitioners can work equitably with all communities;
7. Encourage teaching and practice collaboration with community organisations, under-represented groups, and service users to co-design plant-based nutrition support materials, thereby building inclusive practice.

These measures can help ensure the benefits of well-planned plant-based diets are accessible to all.



### 3. Inclusion and Equity

The Vegan Society notes that impoverishment is deepening in Wales (JRF 2025) and increases with multiple marginalizations, including for single parent, Disabled, Black households (Food Foundation 2025). Discrimination around access to work is significant in impoverishment, including of healthcare students and professionals in Wales forced to call on food banks (Anderson 2025). Provision in food banks for those with particular dietary needs (medical, philosophical or religious), appears to be unreliable (Taylor, Boyland & Hardman 2024). Therefore, vegans will be amongst those struggling the most in healthcare professions and training.

Our research tends to support this conclusion: Around one third (35%) of Registered Dietitians were unaware that vegans have protection under the Equality Act 2010 (The Vegan Society 2024a). One vegan Dietitian reported that, during training, they were sent to a catering lecturer on meal preparation without any consideration of the beliefs of students. Each of over 50 students was given a whole dead chicken including head and internal organs. Despite claiming from the lecturer their right to ethical belief exemption, the vegan student Dietitian was not excused, and had to sit in the class until the first break. They reported, "I was absolutely besides myself, worst day of my life!!". This is clearly unacceptable, and could constitute unlawful indirect discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

One of the main barriers to adopting and maintaining a healthy vegan diet, particularly centred around whole foods, is financial cost. This barrier operates through the high cost per calorie of many vegetables and fruits, the potential cost of unfamiliar foods going to waste, the remaining 'vegan-premium' on some plant-based protein foods, as well as erroneously perceived higher costs. Another barrier is meal preparation time and knowledge. Our survey also found that over three quarters (79%) of Dietitians cited limited formal education and one third (33%) lack of workplace support as professional barriers for Dietitians in advising on whole-foods plant-based diets (Metoudi et al. 2025).

This points to key training needs for Dietitians to increase inclusion and equity in healthcare: specific whole-foods plant-based diets knowledge for impoverished people, including their healthcare students and professional colleagues. One Dietitian surveyed commented, in line with our recommendations: "I believe vegan diets should have a space within religious dietary choices due to its protection by law and to emphasise considerations for dietary advice." (The Vegan Society 2024a).

#### **The Vegan Society Recommendations**

Ensure that all Dietetics and other healthcare training and continual professional development (CPD) courses:

1. Cover veganism as a protected philosophical belief when discussing protected characteristics, and ethical and religious diets, so that practitioners can meet their professional requirements including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and equality, diversity and inclusion;
2. Incorporate modules on sustainable diets with explicit coverage of whole-foods plant-based nutrition;
3. Address key misconceptions (e.g. around whole-foods plant-based protein, and micronutrients) via evidence-based teaching, and practical workshops (e.g. meal planning, nutrient adequacy) to increase support across all health-care specialisations;



4. Ensure availability of up-to-date, open-access resources on plant-based nutrition for later reference.

**Ensure all Dietetics courses:**

5. Embed teaching on advocacy and workplace change to increase support for plant-based nutrition in clinical, institutional and community settings to support Dietitians' ability to act;
6. Include content on affordability, accessibility, cultural adaptability of plant-based diets (e.g., for low-income households, Global Majority community diets, time-constrained contexts, belief-based needs) in varied settings (community, rural, underserved) to so that future practitioners can work equitably with all communities;
7. Encourage teaching and practice collaboration with community organisations, under-represented groups, and service users to co-design plant-based nutrition support materials, thereby building inclusive practice.
8. Build mentorship and support systems for Dietitians working in less-resourced settings, to ensure equitable career opportunities and practice competence in sustainable and plant-based nutrition.

Sustainable diets accessible to all healthcare students and professionals in Wales are a vital part of ensuring inclusion and equity in recruitment, retention and career progression across all specialisms.



#### 4. Technology in Education

The Vegan Society notes that the use of non-human animals in training of healthcare professionals is almost always unnecessary, frequently inappropriate, and unacceptable to many people based upon their protected beliefs, including veganism.

The Vegan Society advises that healthcare training should be based upon the biomedical study of humans, to ensure that learning is relevant. Animal Free Research UK is a leading biomedical research organisation which focuses upon human-relevant technologies. They advise policy-makers on how human-specific techniques, including computer modelling, large machine learning (so-called 'AI'), 'organs on chips', 3D printed tissues, and the use of ethically donated human tissues, can improve our teaching, learning and research. Because these technologies are based directly on human biology, there are no uncertainties or errors introduced by translating from non-human animal knowledge (Animal Free Research UK 2025).

As well as producing better training, human-relevant techniques are more likely to be suitable for vegans in healthcare education and professional development teaching and learning.



## 5. Supporting Educators

The Vegan Society notes the fundamental role of good nutrition for educators, practitioners and service users across all healthcare specialisms.

The Vegan Society Nutrition team, currently consisting of two Registered Dietitians, deliver student and professional training courses on whole-foods centred, plant-based and vegan suitable nutrition and dietetics.

This training can also support educators when they are updating their curricula to incorporate the growing emphasis on plant-based diets for dietetics, health and sustainability. Educators themselves may also find direct benefits if they are seeking to adopt healthier, plant-strong diets themselves.

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