

Meat-free Mondays coming to all Surrey schools?

2 May 2024



Meat-free and plant-based options could be mandated across Surrey schools every Monday according to new council guidance. Only some Surrey schools currently participate in a form of ‘meat-free Monday’ so the new food strategy would expand its remit.

The new policy forms part of the so-called Surrey Healthy Schools initiative. The initiatives aims to address food insecurity, reduce climate impact of the local food system and support the local population to keep a healthy weight by improving the accessibility and affordability of nutritious food.

Speaking at a Surrey County Council (SCC) meeting on April 29, Officer Marisa Heath said: “I don’t think meat-free Mondays is too much to ask for one day a week. We’re still giving six days a week for people to make other choices so I don’t think it is draconian or heavy handed.”

Council officers said the preferred menu would prioritise fruit, vegetables and legumes- rather than processed, plant-based meat alternatives. Only schools signed up to the Surrey Healthy Schools will be part of the initiative, including all SCC public schools and some private schools.

Framing the programme as being to “educate and not dictate”, Cllr Mark Nuti (Conservative/ Chertsey) said the policy is empowering individuals and families to make informed and healthy food choices.

The committee discussed the importance of sustainable and locally sourced farming, as well as cutting meat to decrease carbon emissions and environmental resources. It was noted that ‘plant-based’ food was not always “nutritional”, but that children needed fibre from fruit and vegetables.

The new strategy aims to increase children’s nutrition and combat obesity, as well as increasing sustainability and environmentally conscious eating. Around 1,210 of 9,355 Year 6 pupils measured in Surrey were classed as obese or severely obese in 2022-23, NHS figures show.

Healthy food, such as fruit and vegetables, are often out of reach for many parents on low incomes who prioritise affordability over nutrition. The amount of vegetables being purchased in the UK has fallen to its lowest level in 50 years, according to The Food Foundation.

“Levelling up is not just about buildings, it’s about people,” Officer Marisa said. “It’s about their wellbeing, mental and physical, and allowing them to reach their [potential].”

Councillors argued the strategy must be adaptable to children who may suffer with eating disorders, have neurodiversity requirements or medical issues, and not be able to eat (or do not want to eat) plant-based food.

In a heated debate, concerns were raised about the policy going ‘too far’. Cllr Trefor Hogg (Conservative/ Camberley East) said an extension to adults and elderly people with dementia could mean “being confronted with things they just can’t cope with”.

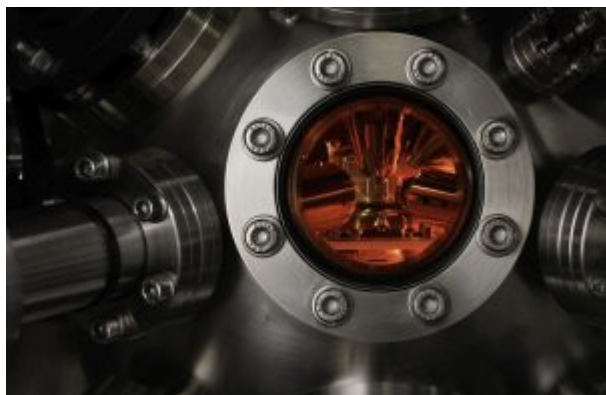
He added: “My particular concern of those who are in any form of social care have had their liberties and freedom restricted to some degree. It’s very very important that they have a full choice. This is particularly important where there are neurodiverse and mental health issues as well. I think we should be very explicit on the subject. I would be very concerned about the adults and the elderly being confronted with things they just can’t cope with.”

Meeting documents stated the eating environment should be inclusive and social as restricting to plant based only options may make some feel excluded.

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Surrey Uni joins top beam team

2 May 2024



The creation of a first-of-its-kind imaging system at the **University of Surrey** could help the UK lead a revolution in materials sciences. The new facility promises a better understanding of the effects of pharmaceuticals and could eventually lead to better drug development.

Thanks to a £3 million grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, Surrey will work with the UK SME Ionoptika and the University of Manchester to deliver a new Multimodal Ion Beam Imaging Facility, which will allow researchers and businesses to understand materials at an unprecedented microscopic level.

Professor **Melanie Bailey**, Principal Investigator of the project from the University of Surrey, said:

“The fact that Surrey and, indeed, the UK has the ambition to build this truly unique facility should not only excite researchers in academia and industry, but it signals that we are serious about breaking new ground in a range of scientific areas.”

The facility will house a “multimodal 3D elemental and molecular imaging system at a sub-micron scale”. This highly advanced system, similar to a powerful microscope, will be able to see the tiniest details of materials and molecules, smaller than a speck of dust.

The new system will be the first in the world to use beams of charged particles at high and low energies to measure biological systems and materials. The high-energy beams will be delivered by a particle accelerator at the UK National Ion Beam Centre, a national research facility funded by EPSRC and led by Professor **Roger Webb** at Surrey. The system will produce X-rays, gamma rays, and particles, and the combination of this information will give a detailed map of the elemental and molecular makeup of materials.

Professor Roger Webb, co-investigator of the project and Director of the Surrey Ion Beam Centre, said:

“This is a really exciting development for the Surrey Ion Beam Centre. We have been a national research facility since 1979, and we support over £100 million in funding from more than 30 universities. This is one of several upgrades to our centre, and we are looking forward to opening our doors to researchers across the UK to make the most of this investment.”

Surrey’s new facility is expected to benefit more than 25 UK universities and companies in health, energy, technology, and engineering.

Professor **Paul Townsend**, co-investigator of the project, said:

“There is currently nothing in the world quite like this new facility of ours. It signals to the global scientific community that the UK means business. We are confident that we will attract researchers worldwide to use this facility, giving the UK an edge in materials science.”

Along with medical breakthroughs, Surrey’s researchers believe the facility could help the energy sector create more efficient solar cells and durable batteries. The team also hopes this project will allow them to understand pollutants better and develop new ways to reduce climate change.

Paul Blenkinsopp, Managing Director of Ionoptika, said:

“Ionoptika is delighted to have been chosen to build the new imaging system in collaboration with Surrey. Whilst an SME, we have established ourselves as global experts in ion beam technology over the past 30 years and will be very proud to bring our decades of imaging expertise to this unique facility.”

This project contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Image of Ionoptika’s J105

Epsom UCA alum praised by Taiwan President

2 May 2024



Leo Tsao graduated from UCA in 2017 with a BA (Hons) in Fashion Atelier.

He has just won season 16 of **RuPaul’s Drag Race** as his banana-themed glamazon Nymphia Wind.

Chip Harris, Programme Director in Fashion at UCA, who taught Leo for the entirety of the course and helped manage his final collection, said: “Leo developed a great range of skills on the course and as a very conceptual thinker, he was always ambitious and individual in his approach. Leo’s graduate collection epitomised this, which demonstrated an exceptional technical and creative skillset that was also selected to show at Graduate Fashion Week.

“I am not surprised to see his ascension within the RuPaul’s Drag Race universe, and it is good to see that he used his skills to showcase amazing costumes, styling and visual narratives.”

UCA President & Vice-Chancellor, **Professor Jane Roscoe**, added: “The whole of UCA, and especially our School of Fashion and Textiles, is celebrating the unique and incredible talent of Nymphia, and her victory in RuPaul’s Drag Race. As ‘America’s Next Drag Superstar’, we are so excited to see what she does next!”



Among the high-profile people congratulating Nymphia on her win, was the **President of Taiwan, Tsai ing-wen**, who said: “Congratulations to you, Nymphia Wind, for being so accomplished in the difficult art form of drag, and for being the first Taiwanese to take the stage and win on RuPaul’s Drag Race. Right after being crowned queen, you said ‘Taiwan, this is for you’. Taiwan thanks you for living fearlessly.”

Top Image: *Nymphia Wind in her finale outfit. Credit: Entertainment Weekly/Mettie Ostrowski*

Left image: *Leo Tsao, pictured for his final collection shoot at UCA in 2017.*

Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy: Healing Through Connection

2 May 2024



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Excellence in aging for LGBTQ+

2 May 2024



More can be done to make sure LGBTQ+ adults age with dignity and their needs are met in the UK, say researchers from the **University of Surrey**. Together with Tonic Housing, the UK's first LGBTQ+ affirmative retirement community, researchers from Surrey are launching The Life House Project - a participatory theatre-based initiative to explore the unique housing and care needs of the LGBTQ+ community in London.

Many LGBTQ+ individuals face anxieties about housing and care as they age. The Life House Project aims to address these concerns by providing a platform for older adults to share their experiences and explore solutions collaboratively.

Through seven workshops and one-on-one interviews, the project will create a space for participants to use creative expression through theatre, scriptwriting, and poetry. This approach will help participants tell their stories and highlight their specific needs and desired forms of support.

Dr **Georgia Bowers**, Lecturer and Programme Leader of Applied and Contemporary Theatre BA (Hons) at the Guildford School of Acting and lead researcher, said:

"We are particularly interested in how creative methods can support LGBTQ+ older adults to not only share their own experiences but also become advocates for themselves and the wider LGBTQ+ community. By communicating their concerns and aspirations through theatre and creative expression, we hope to ignite a conversation that leads to a more inclusive future for individuals in terms of housing and care."

Dr **Richard Green**, Surrey Future Fellow at the University of Surrey, said:

"We are excited about the potential of theatre and creative expression to empower LGBTQ+ older adults to share their stories and advocate for better care and housing options.

"This project goes beyond simply collecting data; it's about creating a space for authentic expression and collaboration. By working together with participants to explore their needs through creative mediums, we aim to amplify their voices and create a lasting impact on how LGBTQ+ care is approached."

Professor **Andrew King**, Head of Sociology and Co-Director of Surrey's Centre of Excellence on Ageing at the University of Surrey, said:

"The Life House Project can make a significant contribution to creating more inclusive and supportive housing and care environments for LGBTQ+ people. It provides a new interdisciplinary and creative approach to highlight often hidden inequalities and issues and we hope it will influence policy changes and inspire service providers to create spaces where individuals can truly feel safe, valued, and supported as they age."

A celebratory event will also be held on Monday 24 June, to coincide with London Pride week. This event will showcase a project film documenting the journey of The Life House Project and its impact on participants. The event will also serve as an opportunity to connect the project's findings with the broader LGBTQ+ community and discuss potential solutions for creating more inclusive and supportive housing and care environments.

Bob Green OBE, Head of Operations at Tonic Housing said:

"Tonic is very excited to take part in the University of Surrey's Life House Research Project. The use of theatre and drama to examine the themes of housing and care in later life has piqued the interest of many residents and it has attracted other older LGBT people from outside Tonic.

"We are particularly interested to learn about residents' experience of living in the UK's first LGBT+ Retirement Community as well as how housing and care services for older LGBT people can be improved.

"Some older LGBT people have had terrible experiences in the past but having worked with University of Surrey researchers, we value their inclusive approach and supportive attitude, so we look forward to exploring challenging incidents safely and positively."

Animal health benefits human health

2 May 2024



Ensuring animals are treated well throughout their lives and using sustainable farming practices are at the heart of an ambitious partnership to control the spread of infectious diseases and improve animal welfare. The University of Surrey's School of Biosciences and School of Veterinary Medicine have joined the European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare. The University is set to receive over £2 million from the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme.

Along with helping to prevent and control diseases in terrestrial and aquatic animals, the partnership will also encourage the careful use of medicines and develop methods to maintain high welfare standards. The partnership involves 90 members from 24 countries, and the initiative's total funding is €360 million.

Professor Roberto La Ragione, the Surrey Principal Investigator and Head of the School of Biosciences at the University of Surrey, said:

"With the rising numbers of diseases in animals that are spreading to humans, the scientific community is waking up to the fact that animal health and welfare are inextricably linked to our own.

"I'm proud that our University is joining colleagues from across the country and Europe, so that we can not only share and tackle these issues at a large scale, but also find sustainable solutions that improve the wellbeing of the animals that we share this planet with."

The European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare aims to support a food system that is fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly. Its goals align with the European Green Deal and the related Farm to Fork strategy, which focuses on sustainable food production.

Professor Kamalan Jeevaratnam, Head of the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

"Our University has a long-standing commitment to the One Health, One Medicine ethos, and we are excited to share our expertise and learn from our partners. This collaboration underscores the UK's significant role in advancing the wellbeing of humans, animals, and our natural environment for a better future."

Nathalie Vanderheijden of the University of Ghent, coordinator of the EUP AH&W, sums up the partnership as follows:

"Our partnership is a new, open initiative, bringing together EC funding, national/regional funders and research-performing organisations to concentrate efforts on developments with high societal, economic and policy impact. Belgium, with its current presidency of the European Council for six months, appreciates the potential of unity in driving change!"

Speaking of the Partnership EFSA's, Chief Scientist Carlos Das Neves said:

"We are pleased to announce that EFSA will be a full partner of the European Partnership Animal Health & Welfare. This is the first time that we will be a beneficiary in a research partnership under Horizon Europe, which will enable a smoother transition from research to regulatory science. We are prepared and committed to bring our expertise to the table, together with the best experts in Europe, for the benefit of animal health and welfare."

The European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare started on the 1st of January 2024 and held its kick-off meeting on the 26th and 27th of February 2024 in Brussels. All partners signed the Grant Agreement on the 29th of March 2024.

Image: Marie Anna Lee

Epsom's Earth health doctor checks GMC

2 May 2024



Epsom residents led by Dr. **Kristine Damberg** converged Thursday 18th April on the General Medical Council (GMC) headquarters in Central London, decrying what they perceive as the regulator's lackluster response to the urgent health risks posed by climate change. The demonstration, organized by the **Planetary Health Coalition**, aimed to spotlight the pressing need for action on climate-related health issues affecting the community.



Dr Damberg protesting outside General Medical Council.

Dr. **Kristine Damberg**, Senior Simulation Practitioner and ESTH Sustainability Champion based at **Epsom Hospital**, voiced concerns about the immediate health impacts of climate change in the area. She lamented the rise in climate-related ailments among patients, including heat-related illnesses during the 2022 heatwave. Dr. Damberg emphasized the gravity of the situation, citing staggering statistics: "In the UK, 29-43,000 people die unnecessarily every year because of air pollution."

Adding: "Even in a relatively affluent area like Epsom we are seeing these impacts on patients presenting to GP surgeries and hospitals. In the 2022 heatwave there were 3000 excess deaths in the UK and on the wards at Epsom Hospital the temperature was consistently above 30 degrees. It was extremely challenging for staff to work and keep already vulnerable patients safe at these extreme temperatures."

She stressed the imperative for proactive measures, echoing The Lancet's designation of climate change as the most significant global health threat of the 21st century. "We need to act now to protect our community."

However, the GMC's recent efforts to incorporate sustainability into medical ethics guidelines have fallen short, according to Dr. **Rammina Yassaie**, a medic and ethicist. She criticized the optional nature of these additions, stating, "Practising climate-conscious medicine should be a clear duty of a doctor." She called for more robust guidance from the regulator to address the climate crisis head-on.

Epsom resident **Warren Bunce** echoed these sentiments, expressing disappointment in the GMC's perceived inaction. "The General Medical Council's silence on climate change is a betrayal of public health," he asserted. He called for stronger support for healthcare professionals in Epsom and beyond to confront the health consequences of a warming planet.

Protestors also raised concerns about the GMC's financial ties to fossil fuel industries. Dr. Christelle Blunden, a GP from Southampton, highlighted the disconnect between the GMC's ethical standards and its investments. "Doctors want their money out of ecologically destructive industries," Dr. Blunden stated. She emphasized the need for regulatory bodies to lead by example in addressing the climate crisis.

The protest occurred amidst growing legal restrictions on climate activism, with the recent conviction of Dr. Sarah Benn, a GP from Birmingham, serving as a stark reminder of the risks faced by healthcare workers advocating for environmental causes. Dr. Benn's case underscored broader concerns about the erosion of protest rights in the UK, prompting calls for greater protection for activists.

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Job insecurity upsetting collegiate life

2 May 2024



Nearly 92 per cent of voters in a Surrey University College Union (UCU) indicative survey supported holding a vote of no confidence in the Vice Chancellor, with a further 96 per in favour of a vote for the executive board.

Surrey UCU has been campaigning against ‘compulsory’ redundancies and financial severance elicited by the University of Surrey in an all-staff emergency meeting on March 6. Vice Chancellor Professor Max Lu (VC) announced the university would have to cut staff and assets as part of cost-saving exercises.

A UCU open letter dated April 11 alleged the university was trying to turn a “£10m deficit” into a “£10m surplus”. A spokesperson claimed staff feel they have been “coerced” into redundancy, or “feeling that their hand has been forced”.

An academic, who wished to remain anonymous, said: “It’s extremely distracting and upsetting [...] Commitment to the university falls and commitment to your work falls. You invest a lot of time into your institution and when your institution doesn’t value you back, you question why.”

Speaking about her department, she said: “It’s horrible. Morale is very low” and people feel “very insecure about their jobs”.

High inflation, soaring energy bills and overall cost of living pressures were cited by the VC as reasons why the university needed to reduce its expenditure. Sector-wide problems within Higher Education such as “devaluing domestic tuition fees” and declining numbers of international students “due to external factors” were also highlighted in a letter by the VC

However, the UCU argued that poor financial management in “historical borrowing and significant spending on multi-million-pound projects” undermined the VC’s claim. Recent developments include the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI (opened in 2021) and launching a new medical school with an intake for 2024.

Over 90 per cent of the university’s income was borrowed externally, coming second in the UK in 2021/22. Gross debt increased by £16.6m in 2022/23 to £296.5m compared to 2021/22, as the University entered into a new £20m term loan used to support the purchase of a building on campus, this was partially offset as a result of scheduled repayments.

Soaring from 0.1 per cent interest rates in December 2021, to 5.25 in 2023, the university now has to pay back around 4.5 per cent interest in its loans (2024).

“It’s a reckless [...] way of living,” the academic said, “to borrow, borrow, borrow with the hope that you will make that money back.”

Rather than trying to “play with the big boys” and be a Russell Group university or UCL, the academic said, “Surrey needs to play to its strengths” as a small, safe university in Guildford which looks after its students.

Fewer Surrey UCU members voted to start formal industrial action (75.3%) than those in favour of a no confidence motion. Academic staff explained striking would mean taking teaching away from university students, who were not at fault.

The union is meeting on April 22 to discuss the next steps and has invited MP Angela Ricardson and parliamentary candidates to attend.

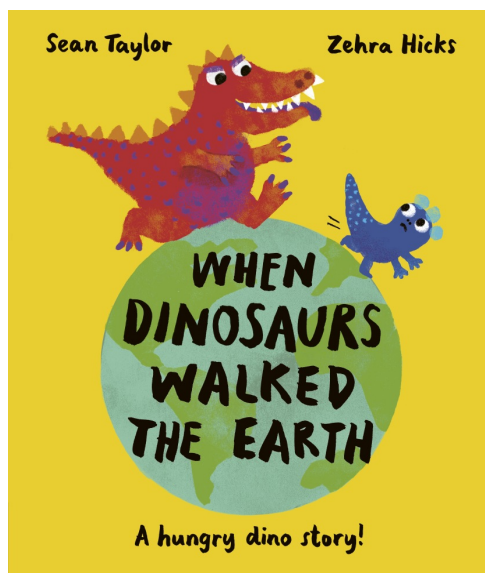
A spokesperson from the University of Surrey said: “Our University is not immune to the unprecedented financial pressures facing the UK’s higher education sector - including high inflation, high energy costs, the sustained devaluation of tuition fees and the recent decline in international student numbers. We’re taking a focused and nuanced approach to tackling these sector-wide challenges at Surrey, with our approach designed to minimise the impact on our people and our core mission. We are looking at a variety of measures to increase income and save on costs including offering voluntary severance to some colleagues. We are hoping to avoid compulsory redundancies.”

Walking with dinosaurs ... not quite

2 May 2024



Epsom-based **Zehra Hicks** is an award-winning children’s book author and illustrator whose books have been translated in over 20 languages. Through her work, she shows the magic of storytelling to children through her comical illustrations, which has led to an already impressive list of accolades, including being highly commended for the Macmillan Prize for Illustration and winner of the Heart of Hawick Award, to name a few.



When Dinosaurs Walked The Earth, authored by Sean Taylor and illustrated by Zehra, is one of five shortlisted books for this year’s £10,000 **Oscar’s Book Prize**. Founded in honour of book-loving Oscar Ashton who passed away aged three and a half from an undetected heart condition, the prize seeks to find the best children’s picturebook, and is supported by **Amazon** and the **Evening Standard** with Princess Beatrice as a patron. The winner will be announced at a ceremony in central London on the 7th May.

Zehra is a tutor at Chelsea College of Arts, where she completed a short course in Book Illustration in 2009.

Since then, she has been highly commended for the Macmillan Prize for Illustration, winner of the Heart of Hawick Award, named Lovereading4Kids Debut of the Year in 2011 and shortlisted for the Read It Again! Cambridgeshire Children’s Picture Book Award.

About Epsom Zehra told the Epsom and Ewell Times: “I moved to Epsom from London 14 years ago when I was pregnant with our second child. For quite a while I missed living London, but now I definitely have the best of both worlds. I feel incredibly lucky to be living in a town with so many open green spaces like Epsom Common and Epsom Downs, yet only being a 35 mins train ride away from the capital.

“I love going for daily walks with my sausage dog, Vincent. Sometimes I even run with him. I’m much more likely to come up with book ideas on a walk or run than stuck behind my desk! And I love bumping into people for little chats. Being an author and an illustrator can be quite lonely, and I find Epsom residents and dog walkers so friendly.

“I work in cafes too, so although some people may think there are too many cafes in Epsom, I happily make use of them ALL! You may often see me in Gail’s or D’s Coffee House with a sketch book working on new ideas. I love the buzz in cafes – it helps my creativity, and I love that there seems to be more and more residents working in cafes, creating a lively working community.”

“Having an art shop and bookshop is a huge benefit to me too, as is the market. It would be lovely to have some more independents though. A few are cropping up, but very, very slowly!”

Image: Zehra Hicks and her sausage dog on Epsom Common

Something special going on at Epsom baths

2 May 2024



Rainbow Leisure Centre in Epsom has recently started running tailored swimming lessons for children with special needs and disabilities.

The sessions – which have proved to be a big hit – take place in small groups in the teaching pool where it is quieter and less stressful for the children. Mums and dads join their young person in the water along with the class teacher, picking up tips on how to help their child feel more confident.

Participants are aged from 4 – 8 years old and have a range of neurological and physical difficulties such as autism, dyspraxia and impaired vision. Children are also welcome to take part in the mainstream classes during the rest of the week if they feel confident enough to do so.

Young swimmer Heidi, seen here with mum Stacey and teacher Ana, loves her classes at Rainbow. Stacey says, “She loves the water and gets to have fun while learning to be safe.”

Mary Mannion, Swimming School Manager at the centre, comments, “The classes are very popular. We’re delighted to be able to offer this service to young people and their families. Keeping fit and safe in the water is so important for children of all ages and abilities.”

Rainbow is run by GLL under the ‘Better’ brand. As a charitable social enterprise, the organisation is committed to supporting the wellbeing of local communities.

SEND swimming takes place on Thursdays at 6.15pm. For more details, look at the app at Better_uk or contact customer services at customer.service@gll.org or call 0330 123 1500.