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Assessing the suitability of the Uni-Food tool in an Irish University setting

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Obesity related diseases are increasing worldwide and causing damaging health issues to the general population[1]. The food environment must be a place that supports healthy eating habits and there is increasing evidence available on the quality of different food environments[2]. As young adults move away from home, their food choices and food environments can change, leaving more room for unhealthy habits to be formed. Since the university campus environment is a place where students spend much of their time and consume many of their meals, there is a need to assess the quality of food available in universities. This research aimed to examine how the university food environment could be assessed with a view to improving the overall standards. A pre-pilot study was conducted at two cafes on campus using the 'Uni-Food tool', a tool developed to audit the campus food environment[3]. This pre-pilot only audited the 'Food Retail Environment' section which was completed in two locations to see whether the tool could be applied to an Irish University setting. The topics covered in this section were 'availability and accessibility -retail level', 'promotion', 'price', 'information', and 'environmental impact – retail level'. Each question was scored using scales of 10, 5, 0 or 10, 7, 3, 0 depending on how fully the outlet met the criteria of the questions. Scores for each section were tallied and weighted according to procedure outlined in the tool. The Uni-Food tool scores universities out of 100 on their implementation of best practice (0–25%: very little; 25–50%: low; 50–75%: medium; and 75–100%: high). The audit tool was straightforward to use, and all questions posed were applicable to the setting. There was insufficient information at the locations to answer one question regarding waste management requiring follow up from the management. Results of the audit found that both location 1 and 2 offered a range of healthy and unhealthy food items, with both having limited vegan and vegetarian items. Location 1 offered the same price for unhealthy and healthy options whereas in location 2, unhealthy options were more expensive. Both locations included promotions inclusive of unhealthy options and allergen/nutrient information was minimal. The overall score for location 1 was 48.69%, while location 2 scored 42.71% suggesting that both locations promoted a predominantly unhealthy food environment. The audit tool selected was suitable to capture an idea of food offerings available on campus and was applicable to an Irish University setting. Food offerings and set up on campus was mixed, with both healthy and unhealthy options available and unhealthy options more prominent. Further auditing will be completed to comprehensively assess the campus food environment.

References

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