



The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies

*Un-Stunned Meat in  
Universities Freedom of  
Information Act Campaign*

## Introduction

The slaughter of animals for human consumption is a contentious matter. Vegetarianism is more prevalent in members of the atheist, humanist and secular communities than the general population and this is often for ethical reasons. It is perhaps not too controversial, however, to state that when animals *are* slaughtered then they ought to be slaughtered humanely. This report will not examine the ethics of animal slaughter, but will focus on evidence for religious privilege instead.

This was first discovered to be a potential issue in universities when Cherwell found that some colleges at the University of Oxford were selling un-stunned, halal meat to students after making [a Freedom of Information request](#). With this precedent and the potential for abuse of religious privilege, it was decided that this was worth investigating at a national level.

It should be emphasised that halal slaughter may allow the stunning of the animal prior to slaughter or forbid it, there is no consensus on this by halal butchers. Under halal rules, an animal must be alive at the point of slaughter, so what stuns are applied have to be carefully calibrated to be strong enough to render the animal unconscious but not dead. This can be difficult to accomplish in smaller animals, especially chicken.

It was found that almost half of universities in the UK self-reported as not serving *any* meat that had not been stunned prior to slaughter. 20% did serve un-stunned meat, with the remainder unsure, not having access to that information or refusing to answer. Chicken was the meat least likely to have received a stun prior to slaughter.

The issue of labelling is an important one, recently [under review](#) and likely to return as an EU-wide issue next year. Regulations are currently being drawn up in the EU for full labelling of the method of slaughter, so consumers know how the meat they are eating has been slaughtered. Only one respondent university said that the method of slaughter was explicitly labelled, with most of the rest saying that un-stunned meat was labelled “halal” only.

This was the AHS’ first Freedom of Information Act campaign into universities. It fulfils the aim of the AHS to “build, support and represent atheist, humanist and secular student societies” by investigating religious privilege in UK universities. There is the potential for further action and publicity for member societies as a result of the information uncovered here. It was largely successful and will stand as a good template for future campaigns.

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## *The Questions*

The Freedom of Information question was worded to be as concise, clear and targeted as possible. The final question submitted to universities across the UK was:

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to make a request for all the information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act.

In order to assist you with this request, I am outlining my query as specifically as possible. If however this request is too wide or too unclear, I would be grateful if you could contact me as I understand that under the act, you are required to advise and assist requesters.

I am seeking the following information in electronic form.

Meat is required by law to be stunned before slaughter, except when it is prepared to meet certain religious dietary requirements, in which case there are exemptions (all kosher and a small minority of halal meat).

- 1) Do your university caterers or sub-contracted caterers operating on behalf of the university or on university premises use meat that HAS NOT been electrically stunned prior to slaughter?
- 2) If yes to 1), what varieties of meat (lamb, beef, chicken etc.)?
- 3) If yes to 1), is the meat clearly labelled as having NOT been electrically stunned prior to slaughter at the point of sale to consumers?

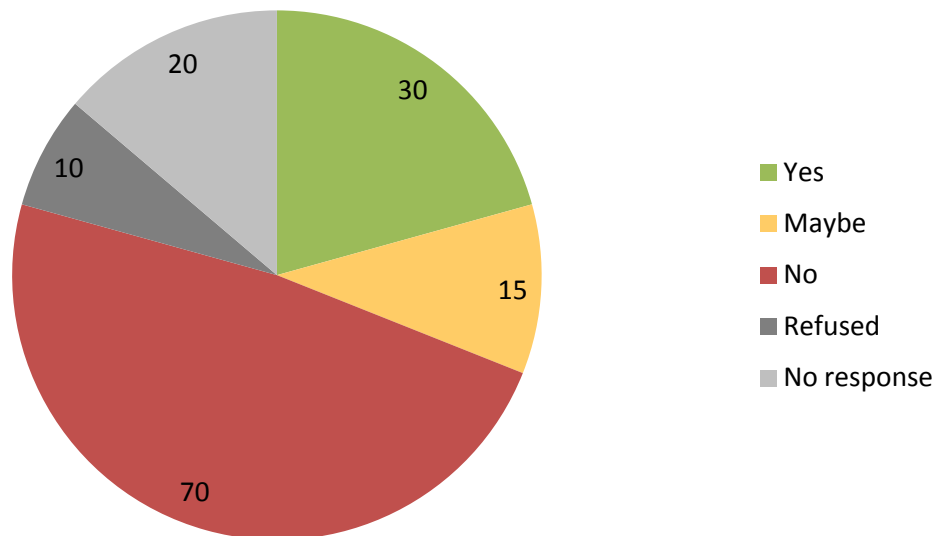
Kind regards

Michael Paynter

[foi@ahsstudents.org.uk](mailto:foi@ahsstudents.org.uk)

## Responses

**Question 1) Do your university caterers or sub-contracted caterers operating on behalf of the university or on university premises use meat that HAS NOT been electrically stunned prior to slaughter?**



### Yes

Un-stunned meat knowingly sold by the respondent.

### Maybe

Un-stunned meat may be sold by the respondent. This designation was used when a response was unclear or when the respondent may not have appreciated that not all Halal meat is un-stunned. This designation was also used for the three Scottish Universities who said they purchased meat through APUC and did not give further details.

### No

Un-stunned meat was not knowingly sold by the respondent. Universities were also put into this category if their caterer was Chartwells, Brakes (who always pre-stun) or Sodexo (who have two non-stunning slaughterers supplying mainly hospitals). This category also includes those Universities who only buy un-stunned Halal meat if requested by guests and do not buy it on a day-to-day basis.

In rare cases the University claimed to have no on-site catering.

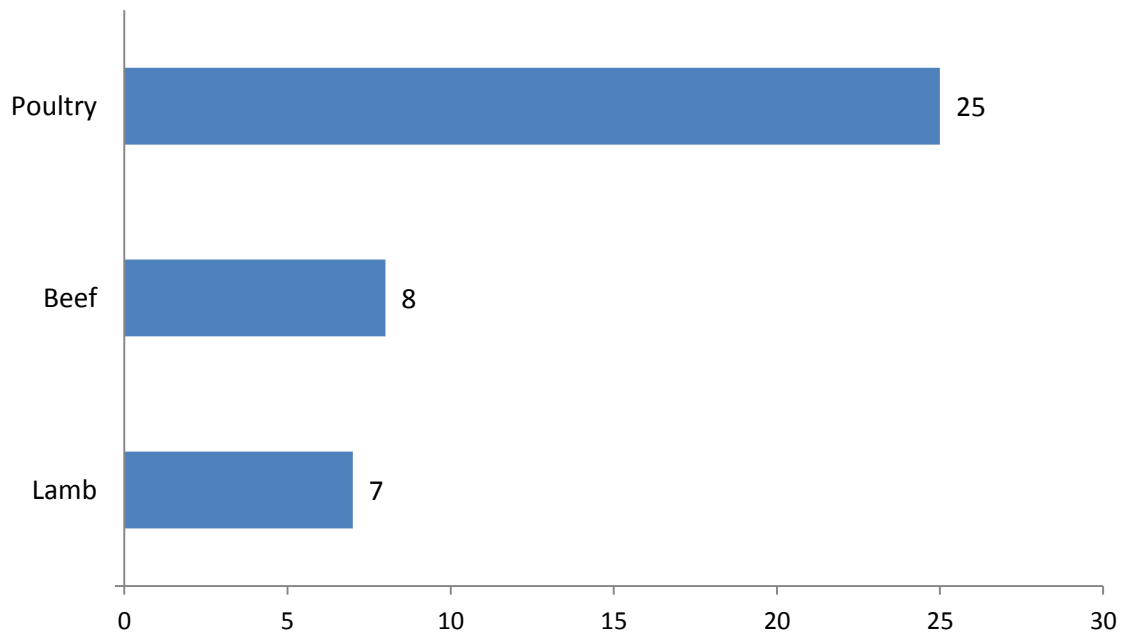
## *Refused*

A response was refused. The most common justification given was that this information was not held by the respondent. Some justified this by saying that we should contact their tenant caterers directly. Private institutes of higher education such as BPP argued that they were exempt from FOIA rules.

## *No Response*

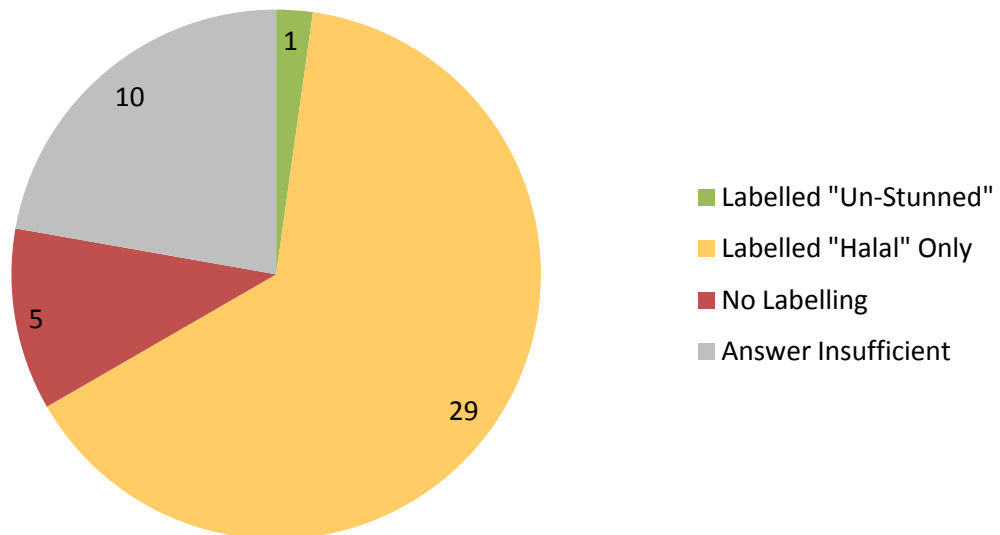
No response to the Freedom of Information Request was given.

**Question 2) If yes to 1), what varieties of meat (lamb, beef, chicken etc.)?**



Of the 29 universities which did sell un-stunned meat, the animals least likely to be stunned before slaughter were poultry. These results only contain the confirmed cases, the 16 universities marked as “maybe” are not included.

**Question 3) If yes to 1), is the meat clearly labelled as having NOT been electrically stunned prior to slaughter at the point of sale to consumers?**



Of the 45 universities which did sell un-stunned meat, or potentially sold it, most labelled it “Halal”, but the method of slaughter was not mentioned. In fact only Birmingham City University answered this with “Yes, on the packaging”.

More worryingly, five universities claimed to not have any labelling for products which may or may not be Halal, stunned or un-stunned. The three Scottish Universities purchasing through APUC claimed not to have any knowledge of how animals were slaughtered for their meat.

## Key Responses

### University of Oxford

Supplier 1: All meat supplied to the University is stunned before slaughter.

Supplier 2: Farmed animals used for products sold by them are humanely killed or slaughtered in accordance with EU and UK law. This includes the stunning of animals prior to slaughter.

Supplier 3: Source their products from abattoirs that meet EC and UK legislation on all fronts.

Adhering to “EC and UK legislation on all fronts” does not mean that the animals have been stunned before slaughter, therefore this answer is insufficient.

### University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge currently contracts with five meat suppliers. All of the meat which they supply to the University is from animals which are stunned before slaughter. If traditional halal or kosher meat is required that meat would only be available to the individual or group that had ordered it.

You should note that the 31 Cambridge Colleges are separate legal entities and separate public authorities for the purposes of the Act. Contact details for the Colleges can be found on the University 's website at <http://www.cam.ac.uk/colleges/addresses.html>.

Cambridge have been categorised as not serving un-stunned meat on the evidence from this reply. Oxford did not mention explicitly that their colleges are separate legal entities; it could be that the Cambridge collegiate structure is significantly different to Oxford's.

### University of Gloucestershire

At the University of Gloucestershire we currently only purchase and use meat that has been electrically stunned prior to slaughter.

We are reviewing this due to the diversity of the business to see if this needs changing, and if we did introduce Halal & / or Kosher meat at a later stage we would ensure this is advertised in the correct method notifying our custom base accordingly.

It might be worth asking the University of Gloucestershire if they would consider fully labelling their meat-products if they choose to introduce Halal and Kosher meat.

## Purchasing Consortia

Some universities purchased meat through consortia and in these cases were unable to give detailed responses. The University of Wales, Newport buy meat through Higher Education Purchasing Consortium, Wales (HEPCW) including small amounts of Halal chicken which is labelled "Halal". Three Scottish universities purchased meat through APUC and did not give further details. The Royal College of Arts is a member of the TUCA buying group.

## *Statements by Caterers*

### Introduction

Many universities and other institutes of higher education have their catering provided by companies who supply a number of the respondents.

### Chartwells

All of the meat we provide to London Metropolitan University is pre-stunned. The pre-stunning technique used may vary according to the method that is most appropriate for a particular animal. Our policy around the sourcing of meat is aligned to the Five Freedoms as set out by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, and endorsed by animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming (CIWF). "The Five Freedoms concept is a DEFRA approved standard that states that where livestock is received and slaughtered onsite, the Five Freedoms must be applied: freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury or disease, freedom to express normal behaviour, and freedom from fear and distress.

### Sodexo

Sodexo provides a choice of meals to organisations and communities reflecting a diversity of cultures and religious faiths. We are committed to purchasing in ways that are ethical, sustainable and maintain the highest standards in terms of traceability, food safety and animal welfare. In sourcing our meat, our approach is to ensure animal welfare is of the highest standard and compliant with UK/EU legislation.

We can confirm that all our meat suppliers stun animals prior to slaughter with the exception of two suppliers who provide dedicated, labelled Halal meals - which are supplied primarily to hospitals - for customers who specifically request a Halal meal.

As far as labelling is concerned, there is currently no UK legislative labelling scheme that requires mainstream products and menus to make consumers aware if the meat is stunned or meets certain religious guidelines. To reduce complexity and to ensure accurate labelling, we believe that a scheme would need to be mandatory across the whole food industry and that this is an area where government should lead.

## Brakes Group #1

Brakes Group is aware of the recent reports in the media relating to the welfare concerns associated with the treatment of animals prior to slaughter.

We take product integrity very seriously and we recognise the importance of respecting the restrictions that a person's religion or beliefs may place on their choice of food.

Brakes Group supplies a range of Halal products, produced in premises that are Halal approved and certified for that product. All Halal products are covered by a current Halal certificate from the relevant Muslim Halal authority in the country of production, and we maintain certificates for all products in the range.

Importantly, all farmed animals used for Brakes own brand meat products, including the Halal range we supply, are humanely killed or slaughtered in accordance with EU and UK law. This includes provision to ensure animals are rendered insensible to pain, distress or suffering prior to killing and includes the stunning of animals prior to slaughter.

## Brakes Group #2

All farmed animals used for Brakes own brand meat products are humanely killed or slaughtered in accordance with EU and UK law. This includes provision to ensure animals are rendered insensible to pain, distress or suffering. There are several humane handling methods that can be employed, although the exact method used will depend upon the animal species and particular operation. Typically these are:

- Gas killing is used for chicken, turkey and pork.
- Electrical stunning is used for chicken, turkey, pork and lamb.
- Captive bolt stunning or captive / penetrative bolt stunning is used for beef.

Products labelled and sold as Halal by Brakes will have been electrically or captive bolt stunned, only.

## CSP Foodservices Ltd

We can confirm that all the chicken products that we supply to Ecovert FM are Halal certified. With regards to red meat, we can only confirm at point of order whether we are able to supply the product as Halal.

## Ecovert FM

We do not brand the product at the point of sale as Halal

## Browns Foodservice Ltd

Importantly, all farmed animals used for products sold by Browns, including the Halal range we supply, are humanely killed or slaughtered in accordance with EU and UK law. This includes provision to ensure animals are rendered insensible to pain, distress or suffering prior to killing and includes the stunning of animals prior to slaughter.

## Aubrey Allen Ltd

Supply Aston University

Aubrey Allen Ltd source meat through an in house approved supplier scheme. All animals are stunned pre-slaughter in accordance with The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter and Killing) Regulations 1995, where stunning is: '...immediate loss of consciousness which lasts until death'. All suppliers are visited and audited before any orders are placed and followed by annual revision.

## National Halal

Supply Aston University

This meat/poultry has been slaughtered in the true Islamic manner; STUN FREE

## Birtwhistle Butchers

Meat isn't stunned prior to slaughter live animals are however.

Animals are required to be stunned by means of legislation. When they are not it is to meet long held religious beliefs not specific "dietary requirements". This includes Shechita (Jewish ritual slaughter), Halal Zibah (Muslim ritual slaughter) and Jatka (Sikh slaughter which is strictly without ritual whereby the animal is beheaded with one swift blow). Within traditional Kosher butchery usually only the forequarter of the animal is utilised by Jews as their tradition is to remove all major blood vessels prior to consumption which is more easily achieved in the fore. The residual hind quarter meat has always been moved in to the general beef market and sold via standard supply. It is a mistake to label the Muslim community as a "small minority" as up to 70% of broiler chickens slaughtered in the UK are killed using the Halal Zibah method as are a percentage of ruminants. Exact figures may be available from the FSA, EHDA, HFC or HFA.

Under strict Kosher/Muslim codes the animal may never be stunned by any means, however some authorities will allow electrical stunning whereby the animal will recover as opposed to invasive stunning with a captive bolt gun. This is currently a subject of great debate within the Muslim community and the Shechita board give regard to this also.

In reply to specific questions:

- 1). We do use meat derived from animals that have not been stunned either electrically or otherwise as that is a business requirement of some of our customer base. This is completely legal.
- 2). All species that are eligible to be eaten by the specific customer.
- 3). In our business we supply Halal meat only not Kosher nor Jatka as regards religious slaughter. Relevant product is clearly labelled as Halal.

## *Conclusions*

It was found that almost half of universities in the UK self-reported as not serving any meat that had not been stunned prior to slaughter. 20% did serve un-stunned meat, but this was only explicitly labelled as such in one case. Furthermore, 10% of universities were entirely unaware of the slaughter methods used for the meat served in their canteens. The AHS believes that the complete lack of labelling prevents consumers from making an informed choice.

We encourage member societies to take this issue up with their unions, universities and canteens. The AHS will be petitioning the NUS to take a stance on this issue.

Sodexo's response indicates that they will only introduce labelling if the Government takes the lead, the AHS, however, believes that caterers can lead the way. We will appeal to the largest catering groups to go forward even without government co-ordination. A relevant precedent in the food industry is Sainsbury's unilateral decision to implement a traffic-light labelling system indicating nutritional value.

Whilst this report specifically addresses un-stunned meat in university canteens, we support the labelling of meat in general. We will write to Caroline Spelman, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, calling on the government to oblige those selling meat to label their products as stunned or not.