

Food insecurity in students; harnessing community and university resources to address it

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INTRODUCTION

- Food insecurity is the inability to access or afford sufficient quantities of healthy food to meet requirements ⁽¹⁾
- Students are an at-risk group, particularly affected by the cost-of-living crisis ^{(2) (3) (4)}
- Food insecurity further increases risk of poor diet, already a concern in young adults ⁽⁵⁾
- In addition, life chances may be negatively affected if attainment at university is impacted

OBJECTIVES

- Ascertain students' cost-of-living concerns;
- Explore possible solutions using existing community networks

RESULTS

Table 1: Food types students would most value at lower cost.

Items	No. (%) of students (n=1090)
Fruit	710 (65)
Pasta, rice, couscous	701 (64)
Vegetables	691 (63)
Cheese, yogurt, butter	523 (48)
Bread	457 (42)

Table 2. Participant levels of agreement with cost-of-living statements.

Rate each of the following statements:	No. (%) of respondents
	Agree
I would value help with my costs if that was available to me	948 (87.0)
I am concerned about how I will manage financially this year	906 (83.1)
I will be working alongside my studies to make ends meet	738 (67.7)

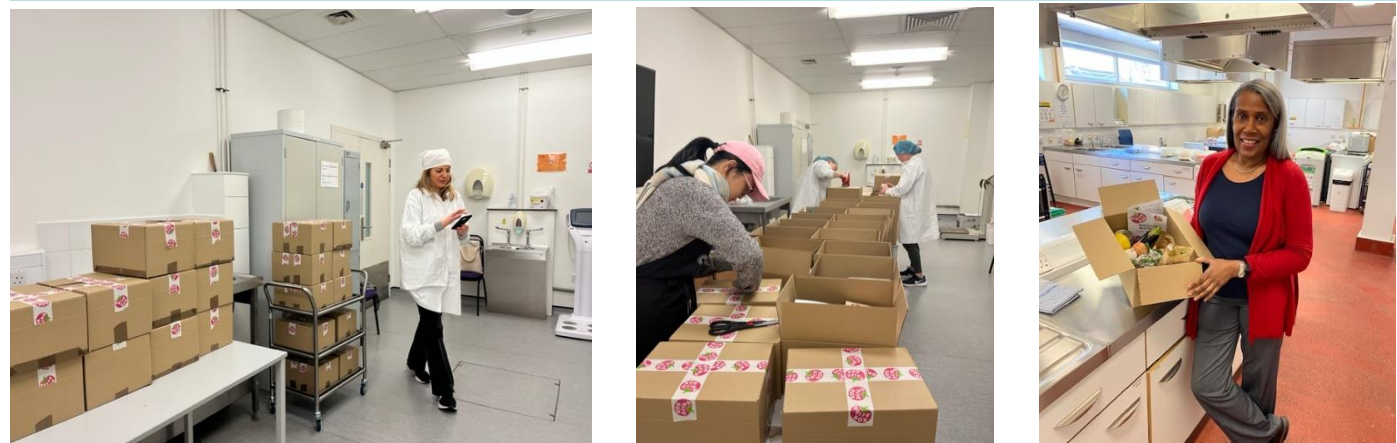
Table 3. Living circumstances of participants.

Accommodation type:	No. (%) of participants (total=1090)
Private rented	554 (50.8)
At home with family	275 (25.2)
Halls of residence	221 (20.3)
Other	40 (3.7)

- **Private rented:** significantly higher levels of concern about managing financially vs. halls of residence (87.2% vs. 81.4% respectively, $p=0.001$).
- Significantly more would value support with their costs vs. with those in halls of residence (89.5% vs. 82.4% respectively, $p=0.000$), or those living at home with their families (89.5% vs. 86.5% respectively, $p=0.04$).

METHODS

- A short snapshot survey was distributed online in one large widening participation university. A total of 1090 students participated.
- Data comprised levels of concern with a series of statements related to cost-of-living using a 5-point Likert rating scale & identification of food and non-food items students would appreciate support with.
- No demographic data other than current accommodation was collected to increase participation & reduce potential stigma.
- Effect of accommodation type on responses was tested using Kruskal-Wallis tests with posthoc Dunn's & Bonferroni correction.
- Existing networks within the universities and links within the community were used to identify & implement potential solutions.



Potential community-based solutions differed by university location. In one, an existing community weekly recipe box scheme for children & families was modified for the university setting & offered monthly to low income students. In the other, an existing community social supermarket was opened to student applicants. Both approaches are currently being evaluated. In both cases, benefits to the community (e.g. knowledge exchange, research, volunteering) have also been established.

CONCLUSION

- High levels of concern about food were found, including for basic foods e.g. pasta, fruit & vegetables.
- Particular concern was apparent in those renting privately, in line with national data.
- Existing community food networks offer potential for universities to support their students, which may benefit retention & attainment.
- Bi-directional relationships, with benefits to the community as well as universities, offer potential to help alleviate cost-of-living concerns among students.

REFERENCES

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