



Surviving or thriving? Exploring university students' ability to access and afford food during the cost of living crisis.

Veronica White // University of Exeter

January 2024

Foreword

Hi, I'm Veronica White, a PhD student within the Geography department at the University of Exeter. I completed my MRes in Sustainable Futures, based at the university's Penryn campus in September 2023. My masters research explored students' experiences accessing and affording food during the cost of living crisis.

This report aims to do two things: first, to highlight the key findings of my research and present recommendations for the university and associated organisations. And second, to share quotes from my research participants, both students and staff. By sharing their voices, I hope to give power to their stories. Unless otherwise stated, the included photos are ones provided by students as part of their photo-based interviews.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the students and staff who participated in my project - thank you for giving me your time and being open to sharing your experiences.

I hope this report proves useful in shaping how you think about student food insecurity. If you have any questions or are interested in discussing any of these findings in more depth, please don't hesitate to get in touch.



Veronica White

v.white@exeter.ac.uk

Recommendations

- 1** Recognise that some Exeter students struggle to access and afford food, which can negatively impact their physical health, mental wellbeing, and social life.
- 2** Understand that a wide range of factors can impact students' ability to access and afford food.
- 3** Ensure that interventions to address student food insecurity go beyond financial measures.
- 4** Conduct further research to understand the scope of student food insecurity on Exeter's campuses.
- 5** Consider alternative suppliers for the on-campus shop in Penryn that would allow for more affordable options.

"Well it's much more common for me to bulk buy stuff and eat stuff past its expiration date, eat stuff that I don't really want to eat a lot more, most of the time." [Student 6]



Background

Food insecurity occurs when an individual is unable to access enough food for a healthy diet¹. University students are an at-risk population for food insecurity², yet there has been limited academic research on this issue at UK universities³.

Some key statistics from previous industry-led research:

44% of UK undergraduate students have been classified as food insecure⁴

43% of UK students have cut back on spending for their food shop⁵

28% of UK undergraduate students have skipped meals to save on food costs⁶

Method

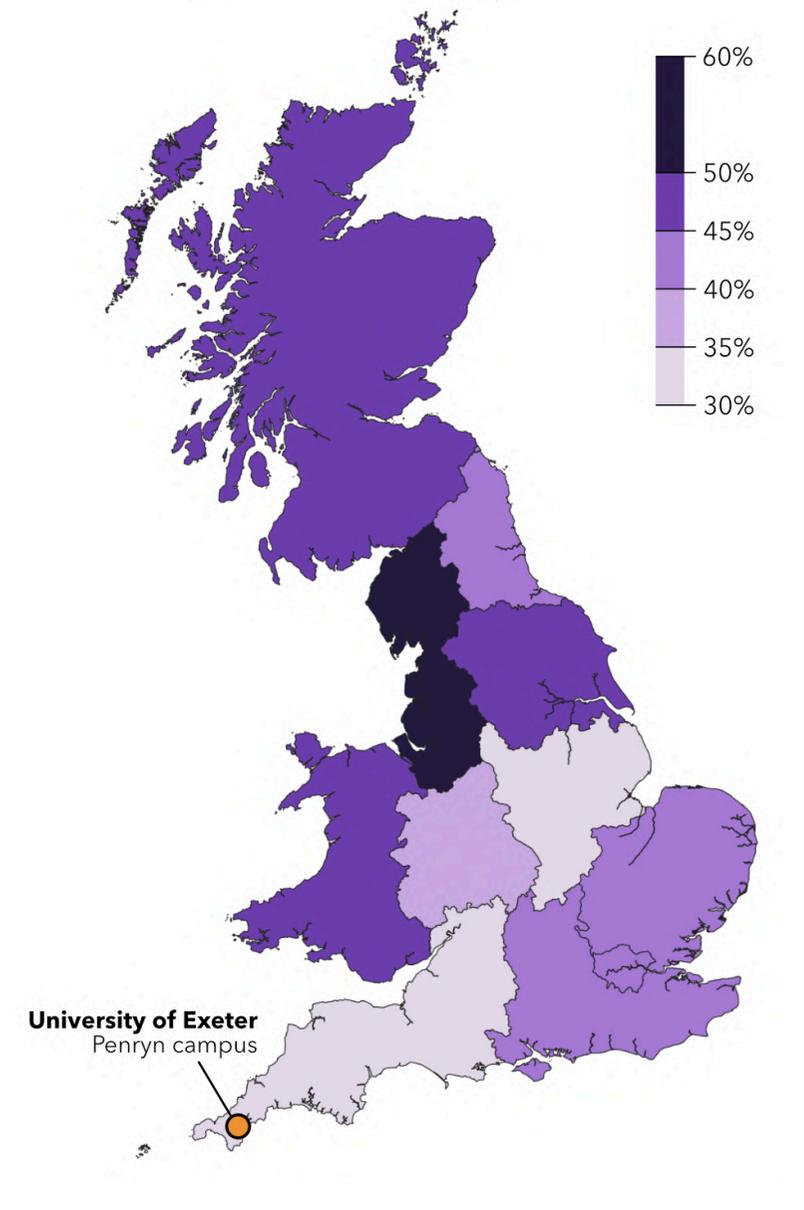
This study explored students' experiences accessing and affording food during the cost of living crisis. The first phase of the project involved eight photo-based interviews with students at the Penryn campus, carried out between March and June 2023. Unless otherwise stated, the images included in this report are ones provided by the students as part of their photo-based interviews.

The second phase of the project involved interviews with six members of staff at the University of Exeter, FX Plus, and the Students' Union (referred to collectively as 'the university').

Although this research was conducted at Exeter's Penryn campus, many of the findings from this project will likely be relevant for Exeter's other campuses (as well as other UK-based universities).

Percentage of undergraduate students classified as "food-insecure"

Data from: Armstrong *et al.*, 2023



Student food insecurity

Students' experiences of food insecurity lay on a scale⁷ (see below). **Half of the students interviewed were food insecure.** These students described experiences that compromised the quantity or quality of the food they ate. The following three pages outline some of the impacts of food insecurity.

University staff recognised that many students are struggling in the face of the cost of living crisis, but stressed that university organisations are facing similar financial challenges. The university has organised a range of measures to support students, but communicating this support can be challenging.

FOOD SECURE

FOOD INSECURE

High food security:

No food access problems



"luckily we have enough money to have a fully stocked fridge...We're not just living off the cheapest things we can find"
[Student 5]

Marginal food security:

Anxiety over food shortage, but limited change to diet



"I rarely feel like I haven't eaten enough that day. So that's good."
[Student 1]

Low food security:

Reduced quality, variety, and appeal of foods consumed

Very low food security:

Reduced food quantity, disrupted eating patterns



"This is just condiments on rice. Plain rice as a meal...I'm eating less good because I don't have a schedule to make nice food"
[Student 6]

Physical health impacts

While students were not specifically asked about health impacts, food-insecure students made references to various negative coping strategies that compromised the quality or quantity of the food they consumed. These may have negative health impacts.

← *"I took a picture of it because **I tend to rely on sugary foods like biscuits a lot these days.** I'd say it's one of the biggest things that I eat. I used to make bulk meals, but at the moment I don't always have access to a kitchen so much, so I've been relying on biscuits quite heavily." [Student 6]*

*"Although I know my mum and dad have said not to eat it, but I can't throw away something that is expensive...**I know I've eaten off stuff as well, and sometimes it has, well, I have been silly, so it has hit my stomach badly.**" [Student 2]*

*"but lack of funds means that at the time I just, **I had to forgo lunch that day,** basically, I didn't have the money to pick something up on the go." [Student 7]*

*"So my food shop's a bit boring, but still...I'm eating well, you know, I've got all my food groups and stuff, I'm just managing to do that. **It's just the things I actually enjoy are gone now.**" [Student 3]*

*"And many times I just don't eat because I am thinking 'oh it's like, if I eat this, I won't have it for like this weekend.' You know. So **I'll stay hungry,** I'll have breakfast at 9, 11 and have my next meal at 5" [Student 2]*

*"that's me **becoming very reliant on microwave meals these days.**" [Student 6]*



Mental health impacts

Struggling to afford food can lead to a range of negative emotions, including embarrassment, anxiety, and stress, which could have subsequent impacts on students' mental health.

← "I made a mug of tea...and then I realised I didn't have any milk. And of course, got no money in my account...**it's just frustration I suppose...feels like a low point I suppose when you can't even afford to get milk for your tea.**" [Student 7]

"I feel **this bill represents a lot of my worry and anxiety about the food...I feel as a person I am constantly anxious looking at the quantity of food**, like any time I cook I'm like 'okay how much is left?' I take stock of how much is left. How much do I need? How much do I eat?" [Student 2]

"the lettuce's have gone up, it was like 63p last week and now it's gone up to 70....**And it just stresses me out** how much they go up." [Student 3]

"So a lot of the time I will just kind of do a French exit or just not turn up, or make up a silly excuse, because I don't want to spend that much money in a pub...Which you know **can be a bit draining mentally as well.**" [Student 7]

"I find I'm just buying the same things over and over and over again, cause it's sort of the cheapest option...which is not the end of the world but **it's a bit boring and rubbish.**" [Student 3]

"I also think a lot before taking food. I have to keep calculating....**it tends to lead to a lot of internal guilt.** Okay so I've spent so many pounds...and I'm wasting my parents' money...So it's a lot of anxiety, I would say" [Student 2]

"But **there's definitely an impact on their worry and anxiety about how they get through each term**, you know, with the funding that they have. But you know, that's always been there for students." [Staff 1]



IMPACTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Social impacts

Increased food costs are limiting some students' ability to undertake social activities, which may have mental health implications.

“I’d definitely say there’s been a few occasions, more recently, where I haven’t, well I’ve not gone out or something because I don’t want to go out and spend money, cause I can’t justify doing something fun if food is so much more expensive... a lot of my friends as well, we’ve sort of stopped doing as much fun things, which you don’t need to do, but it’s nice to have.” [Student 3]

“I know a lot of my friends are having to budget a lot more carefully now and are having to stop doing certain things, cause they can’t afford, it’s the balance between being able to afford food and doing other things, like leisurely activities and stuff.” [Student 5]

“I guess at the beginning I spent money, because I wanted to do what everyone was doing to meet people. Then I couldn’t, I was like I don’t have any money... Yeah now, nowadays I don’t go out much really.” [Student 6]

“People will go ‘oh why don’t we go to Gylly Beach Café,’ and you’re like, ‘ohh that’s a bit expensive, I don’t really want to go there,’ but everyone else is saying ‘yes,’ and you’re like do I either say yes and just be a cheapskate or just get water and nothing else cause I really don’t want to buy anything, or do I just back out and just be antisocial?” [Student 7]

“if everyone else is going and accessing a space and you’re not able to, you end up kind of either feeling sorry for yourself or self-selecting out of that social interaction as well, which I had a couple of students this year come up and speak about how that’s impacted their general sense of wellbeing and belonging.” [Staff 5]



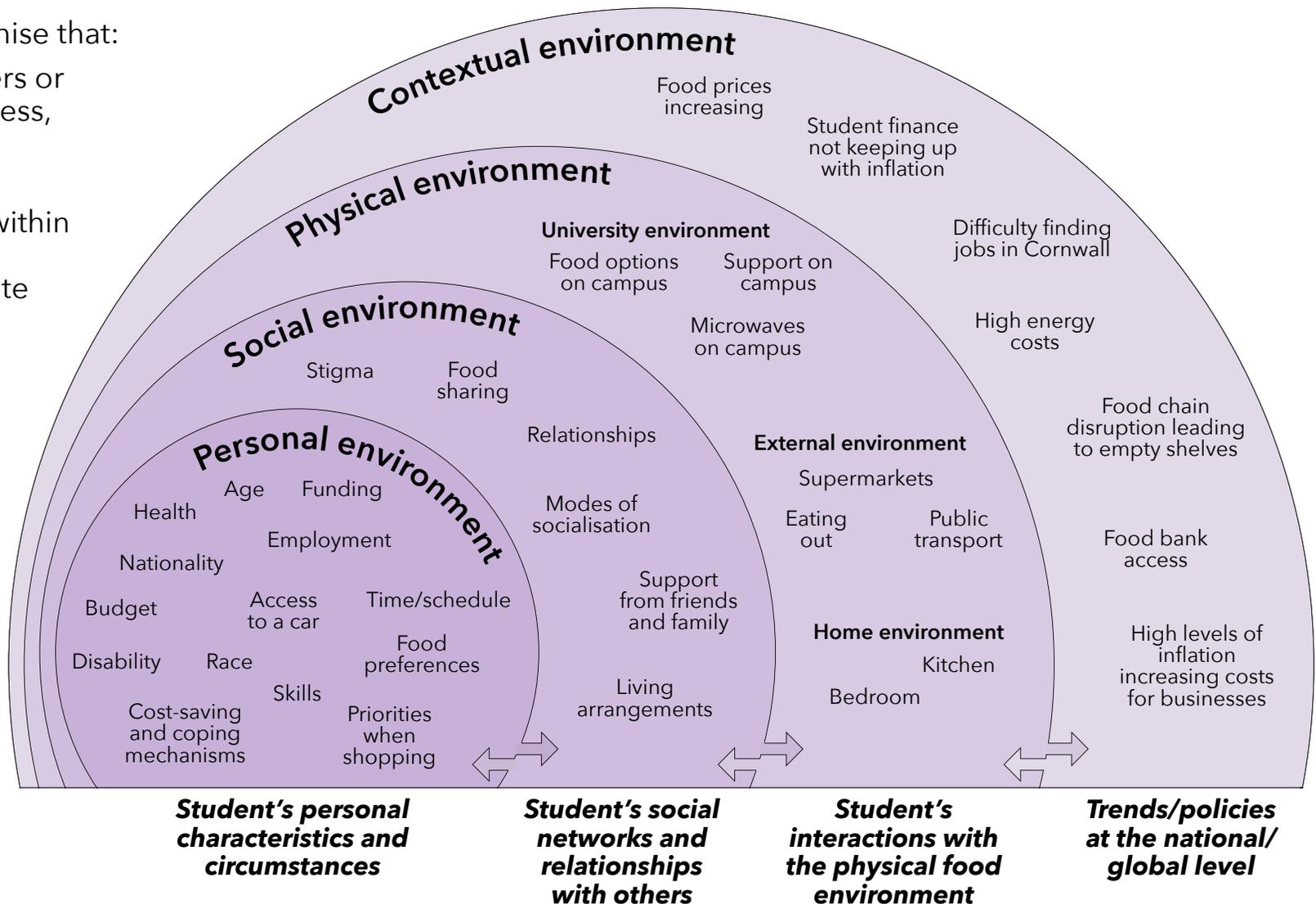
Factors influencing students' ability to access and afford food

Although financial factors are important, students' ability to access and afford food was impacted by a range of factors across multiple 'environments.'

It is important to recognise that:

- factors can be barriers or enablers of food access, depending on the specific student.
- factors can interact within and across scales to mitigate or exacerbate issues of access.

The following pages discuss some of these factors in more depth.





CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Cost of living crisis

At the widest scale, trends at the national and international level can influence food availability and prices, with subsequent effects on food affordability. Students are feeling the cost of living crisis:

← *"I don't buy cheese any more. Which is, it's a small thing, but I love cheese... That used to be 3.99 and now it's 4.80... I miss cheese a lot."* [Student 3]

"I've kept a bigger eye on my budget in the last couple of months, and I have seen things just go up. Something that was £1 is now up to £1.30... in terms of percentage wise, that's such a big increase!" [Student 7]

"I can see it in my bank account going down a bit, cause you just notice it now, you'll be a lot lower in your monthly allowance and you'll just be like 'ohh.'" [Student 5]

Inflation is also hitting the university:

"the cost of running accommodation goes up. Food and drink is going up, transport's going up, there's nothing going down, is there?" [Staff 2]

"our income's deflating and our costs are inflating, massively, over years now. So that squeeze is getting bigger." [Staff 6]

Students are particularly vulnerable to the cost of living crisis due to their reliance on government-funded maintenance loans, parental support, and part-time employment.

"I mean the maintenance loan is smaller and hasn't really changed in line with the cost of living increases" [Staff 5]

Campus shop

The university food environment includes outlets where students access food on campus. There is a tension between accessibility and affordability - the campus shop is by far the closest food shop for students living and working on campus, but students found it to be very expensive:

"this picture represents a lot of financial loss...I try avoid buying from here, cause it's so terribly expensive and I always feel very guilty buying from here...The food is good, but it is too overpriced for us students, I think we are being looted over here, frankly speaking. It's convenient but overpriced." [Student 2]

"I wanted to take a photo of the campus shop cause I think that's extortionate. And I think it's not fair, because a lot of people don't have a lot of choice, especially if you're in first year, and you know, it's quite tricky sometimes to get out, and it's like, everything in there is expensive." [Student 3]

"it's significantly more expensive than other shops" [Student 7]

"it's so expensive, like even the ingredients...they are in the campus, they should at least provide us the affordable food or affordable ingredients." [Student 8]

"I try to have stuff that I've already bought from Asda cause otherwise I have to go to the [campus] shop and the shop is like three times more expensive." [Student 6]

Staff explained why the shop was more expensive:

"Yeah the shop is a bit more dynamic cause the contract we're in, we can't be much cheaper than any of the corner stores" [Staff 2]

"The problem is, it's buying power isn't it? And FX Plus doesn't have the same buying power as say the Coop or Asda" [Staff 1]



The Stannary

Students have different experiences at the Stannary cafeteria depending on whether or not they are catered:

*"I eat there most lunches, so it actually is quite important for what I'm eating and make sure I'm eating healthy. Cause **the food there's pretty good and it's not crazy expensive.**" [Student 5]*

*"I'll go down to the Stannary to get a lunch occasionally, cause the money is relatively good for what it is and it's a nice selection, **it's just a nice change from your regular lunch**" [Student 7]*

*"**catering is a mixed bag.** Like some days it will be alright, and some days it will be like 'what is this?' Sometimes he will get egg shells in like his scrambled eggs or stuff like that." [Student 6]*

*"if you go to the lunch service at the Stannary, the food is brilliant...But if you go for dinner, the food is terrible. **You can distinctly see the change in quality of food...** So I think it's a little unfair that in the dinner, although we're paying a bomb of a price, you're getting food that is not great." [Student 2]*

*"So at least for me I think...they have to revise the catered system because it's kind of troublesome. We know we pay for it but also in **this semester most of the students are willing to have the meal at their flat rather than have the food at the catered hall.**" [Student 8]*

Timing for catered students was also mentioned:

*"**Dinner, however, I think it's a little too early...**it's between 4:30 and 5:00 they start. And they close by 7:00. So, like latest you will have your meal is 6:40. And then I don't think that's substantial enough...to keep you up and going, especially because we are students and we are working in the night also, you know. So, **I don't think that's substantial enough for you to...stay full to the next day morning**" [Student 2]*





Researchers' image

University support

Most of the food-insecure students were not aware of the new food pantry on campus:

"I've never heard of that." [Student 3]

"I knew about the food collective in Falmouth and Penryn, I didn't know about the food pantry on campus." [Student 7]

Food-insecure students weren't sure whether they would be eligible to take food from the pantry:

"it's one of those things that I don't often feel like I'm in need, because I can go to Asda and afford the basics, but ultimately then, I don't know, am I eligible, am I not? I don't really know." [Student 7]

"If I'm allowed." [Student 6]

Only one food-insecure student mentioned having made use of the university's financial support:

"the only support they offer is something called a "Success for All" fund...which has been quite helpful, but it's as I say, a one-off, so it doesn't necessarily fix the problem, it just prolongs it a little bit longer until you apply again which, as nice as it is to get that amount coming through and think 'I'm alright for a bit,' you know you're still going to be in that same situation in a couple of months." [Student 7]

The university offers a range of support to students, but students may not be aware of what support is available to them. Effective communication is key:

"it's difficult, I think, for students to feel confident that there's stuff happening around price and food on campus, when there...probably is stuff now that is happening behind the scenes, but it's just not seen, or talked about." [Staff 4]

Supermarkets

Students shopped predominately in-person at Asda or Lidl, large supermarkets on the outskirts of Penryn. There is, again, a tension between accessibility and affordability:

*"so walking all the way to ASDA, I mean **it's not long, but it's still gonna be half an hour there and back out of your day.**" [Student 6]*

*"Sometimes you don't get the bus, so **you have to walk like three miles back to campus** [from Lidl]." [Student 2]*

*"I'm still shopping at Asda because **I think it's too troublesome to wait for the bus to Lidl and I have to pay for the bus ticket to get to Lidl**" [Student 8]*

*"I think one of the biggest pieces of feedback that we received around cost of living was **food accessibility on the campuses, but also more broadly.** Because obviously the closest shop to campus is Asda, which can be quite pricey in comparison to Lidl which is a little bit further away. And **when it came down to talking about proximity of shops, it was disabled students who tended to be affected by that**" [Staff 4]*

Perhaps as a result of the time required to travel to these supermarkets, students tend to do one big shop that lasts for a week (or more), with lower-quality meals at the end of the week when ingredients are running out/going off:

*"So this is the end of the week...and it's just stuff I have left in my store cupboard basically cause I've run out of fresh food at that point.. **..so it's like my 'I've run out of food' meal basically.**" [Student 1]*

*"I don't think it's an affording food thing, it's just that **I would rather only go to Asda once a week.**" [Student 1]*



Kitchen & bedroom

Students' kitchen environments varied:

← "And I've had my friends come over and be like 'what is this? **This is a pigsty you're living in.**" [Student 2]

"**we tend to all cook around the same time**, like three of us all in there cooking and chatting, it's a good environment" [Student 4]

"It is a nice place to cook but **sometimes living with others can be troublesome**...most of the time, they just make a mess and don't clean up after themselves." [Student 8]

"if you've got **access to a well-equipped and good kitchen, you're likely to be able to cook your own food**, which we know is cheaper than buying anything directly made." [Staff 6]

A lack of physical space impacted some students' food habits:

"I really love to cook the stew or the lasagne, but it takes a really really long time and **when you share the kitchen with six more people, it's not the good idea to cook that.**" [Student 8]

"especially around sort of 5 to 7 o'clock, that's like 'peak time' we call that in the kitchen, and it's like **you can't really cook at that time because...there's just too many people.**" [Student 3]

Students' home food environment extends to the bedroom, where meals are often eaten:

"We often eat in my flatmate's room...the kitchen's like, although it's clean, it's not nice to sit in, so **we'd rather just sit in [her] room.**" [Student 1]

← "**I tend to eat sometimes in bed** or whatever cause there's no space on the desk anymore and there's only one seat in a room." [Student 6]



Housemates & flatmates

Students' relationships with their housemates or flatmates were found to influence their ability to access and afford food. Some examples were positive...

← *"we've already agreed we're going to just eat together, cause **it just makes life so much easier for everyone and makes affording of food a lot easier...**it means not everyone has to go shopping individually. It saves fuel, it saves time for everyone, and also it saves money."* [Student 5]

*"I like it when people do that, **when they bring food home and they'll go 'it's communal,'** so I'm like it's a nice treat...sometimes my flatmate now will make everyone pancakes. And that's nice, cause that's, you know...Basically, a free meal."* [Student 3]

...while another was more negative:

*"there have been times when I have felt a little odd cooking my food also in the flat...I still remember feeling so uncomfortable when all those white boys were looking at me, they just looked, they didn't say anything...**it made me feel very uncomfortable, I felt odd, because of the food that I was eating.**"* [Student 2]

*"for the record, **people have started stealing food in our flat...**But the problem is...you don't know who the hell has done it"* [Student 2]

Whether these relationships are a barrier or enabler of food access depends on the student:

*"But again, **it really depends on how well they get on with their housemates** and that. You could live in a house where you all eat together every night and batch cook things and it's all wonderful, or you could live in a house where you don't get on with your housemates and they steal your food."* [Staff 3]



Time & employment

A range of personal factors may influence students' ability to access and afford food. For example, a lack of time or uncertain schedule was mentioned as a key barrier to accessing food:

"when you've got so much work to do...**there's not really enough time to do any healthy habits**, especially if they're not easy to do" [Student 6]

← "if I forget to bring something in, or **if I'm in a rush, sometimes I do have to forgo [lunch]** and go 'well I haven't got anything' so I have to live off tea for the day" [Student 7]

"there's always that matter of time, cause **there's so many demands on students' time**, that accessing and putting time into thinking about your nutrition rather than just grabbing something that is quick and easy, becomes a challenge." [Staff 5]

Closely linked to students' time is whether or not they take on part-time employment outside of their studies:

"**I work on the weekends...** normally on the weekends you get that time to recuperate and recover, whereas I don't get that...**So a lot of the time I do get a lot more burnt out, a lot more tired**" [Student 7]

"this summer and spring, I've got internships and stuff, so **I'm going to have to work less, which is a bit worrying** cause I've got other things to do where I'm not getting paid for. But then everything is going up." [Student 3]

"there's lots and **lots of students who have to prioritise work, they have to, to be able to survive**. But it just makes studying really, really difficult." [Staff 3]

"And it's not a case of they don't care about their degree and they want to go and do more work, **it's a case of they literally won't be able to afford their housing if they don't pick up that extra shift.**" [Staff 4]

"And the cost of living just meaning that, **you have to actually work quite a lot on top of your studies in order to afford just your general outgoings.**" [Staff 3]



Cost-saving & coping mechanisms

Students made use of a wide range of cost-saving strategies. Food-insecure students also made use of more extreme “coping mechanisms.”

“this is my shopping basket with the Asda essentials...anytime I see that yellow label, if it’s a possibility, like I’ll always go for the Asda essentials alternative of whatever I’m buying, cause it’s cheaper.”
 [Student 6]



<p>Cost saving strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk buying • Buying from the reduced section • Buying supermarket own brand products • Buying frozen/canned food • Buying products on discount (e.g. 2 for £5) • Switching to a cheaper supermarket • Bringing their own food onto campus • Shopping with a friend/partner
<p>Coping mechanisms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating food that has gone off (or is past its best before date) • Rationing food so it lasts longer • Not attempting to balance meals • Splitting a meal for one person between two people • Relying on consumption of energy dense foods • Eating foods you don’t like • Eating food that would otherwise be thrown away • Skipping meals

Stigma

Some students were happy to talk about these topics with their friends, while others avoid the topic:

“I think for international students in general **it’s always a conversation that happens, like ‘oh my god I spent so much money.’** ‘Oh my god this is so expensive” [Student 2]

“Yeah **everyone can’t afford food**, it’s a problem.” [Student 6]

“I don’t like complaining about money because I don’t want people to have sympathy for me...**I still feel it’s difficult to talk about these things with anyone** because I don’t want them to think I’m asking for money, cause I’m not” [Student 7]

“I can’t even afford the bare essentials...it’s a little bit, **I shouldn’t really be embarrassed, but I am.** So, I guess it’s not really something that I’d like to kind of bring up and be reminded of” [Student 7]

While some staff thought there was no stigma associated with students asking for a food parcel, others recognised that some students may be uncomfortable requesting this type of support:

“I think they’re quite open about [requesting a food parcel]...**I don’t think anyone is embarrassed about asking for it...I think they’re quite open to having freebies.**” [Staff 1]

“I think there was definitely a barrier around, well yeah stigma around accepting a food bank box...**you don’t want to fall into those stereotypes of ‘oh that’s our poor friend who needs help.’** ...So I definitely do still think there’s a stigma around food insecurity and I don’t know what the solution is around it. Because I guess it’s a cultural thing, isn’t it, of accepting help doesn’t make you weak, but also encouraging people to get help is okay, you’re not suggesting that they are weak.” [Staff 4]



Student's recommendations

Students were asked if they had any recommendations for what the university could do to better support them. These are some of their suggestions:

CAMPUS SHOP

"I feel that the university should really lower the prices of the shop, that's my biggest...feedback to whoever this report is going to go to, is that the university must reduce the prices of the shop because it's expensive...I can deal with the other issues because they're okay, and some are in my control and some are not in my control, but the university pricing at the shop is too much, I'll be very forthcoming about that." [Student 2]

"I mean I think the school shop and all the food on campus should be made a lot cheaper, because people are still going to be buying it and I think probably more people would buy it, so it's not even like their profits would go down...I think [the university] could probably do that, which I mean, they won't, but that would be nice, I think." [Student 5]

OTHER SUPPORT

"So to improve, yeah just kind of having more fruit things and, I don't know, maybe not just sugary stuff. Because everything they bring to events is always sugar, and usually very very unhealthy. I think it's usually haribos and then some biscuits, sometimes there's popcorn. If they did like a few fruit things and possibly...a savoury carbohydrate? ...I will eat their free food whatever it is, but if it wasn't always sugar, that would be good." [Student 6]

"I know a lot of people don't know how to cook at university... Cooking classes, and especially if they were cheap, that would be nice." [Student 6]

"There are two microwaves next to the library...I love them, maybe some more microwaves on campus? I know they're very much used. I miss them when they're not there, cause you can go to the shop and heat it up and have it. Maybe some cutlery near that as well." [Student 6]

THE STANNARY

"I think, they could do more to show the actual prices of food [in the Stannary]. Cause it is sometimes quite annoying to try and work out how much things are going to cost, cause it's never really that well advertised." [Student 5]

"Dinner, however, I think it's a little too early...like latest you will have your meal is 6:40. And then I don't think that's substantial enough to keep you...up and going...So I think if the Stannary people would be nice and I'd say move it to 8:00 or 9:00 that would be better, however, I do understand that the people who are serving us are also students themselves, so I know that they can't be going home at 9:00 from uni." [Student 2]

"I feel that sometimes when they have beef it becomes very difficult for many students to eat. Because although I know there are the majority of the students are white and...eat beef, there are certain sections of students who are Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, African, who traditionally don't consume beef as a part of their diet. And if they [serve beef at the Stannary] I feel that it's not exactly too fair, they should either put chicken - everybody eats chicken, you know. So many times I have to go for veg option, which I personally don't particularly enjoy." [Student 6]

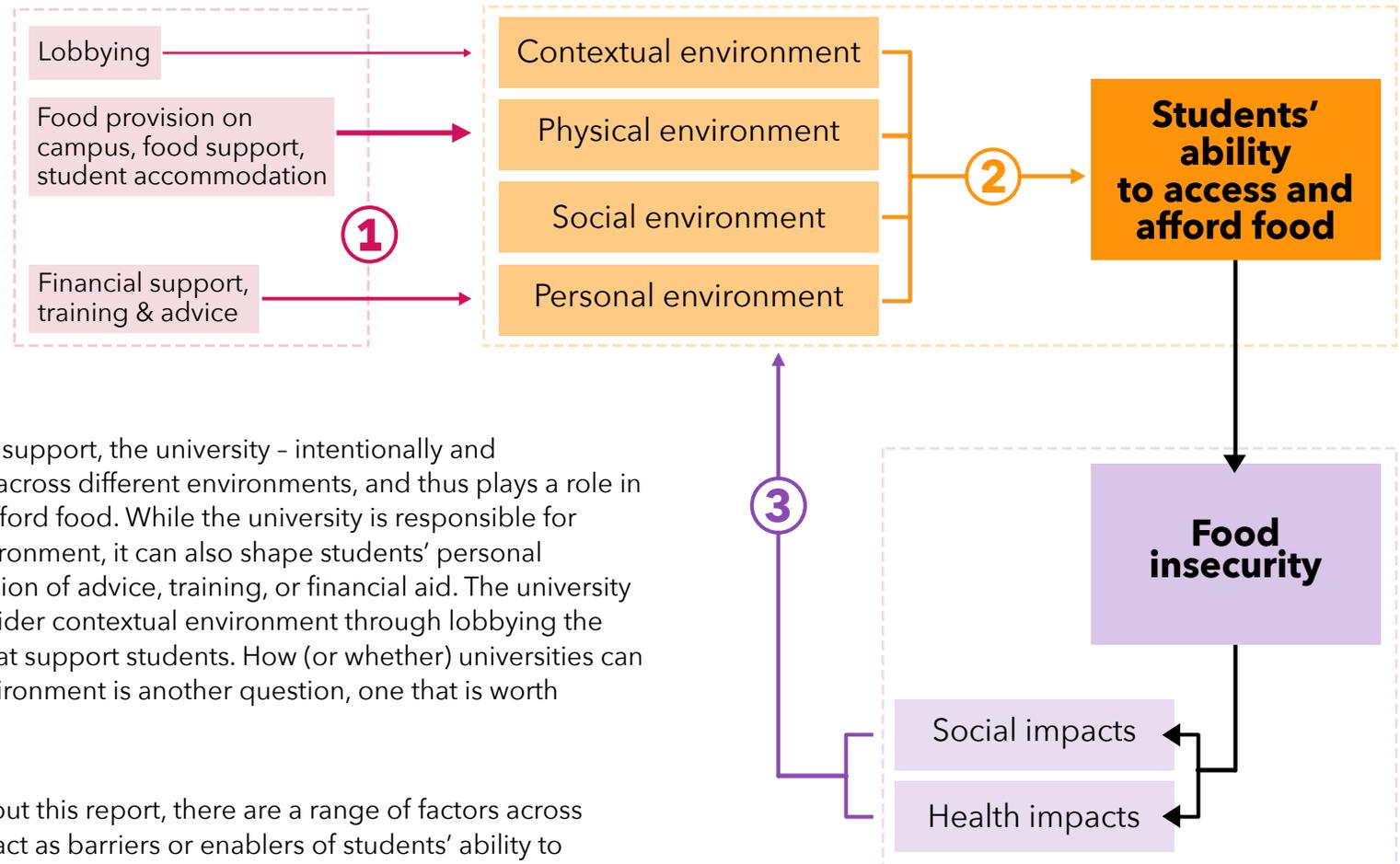
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

"Offer more support, advertise more support. The uni's got the money, but they just won't do it...offer more scholarships, offer more options than just the Success for All fund where you've got to put everything in, your mum's maiden name and your NHS number and everything into the system." [Student 7]

"[Applying for the Success for All fund] has been improved already...now it's all done on a Microsoft Forms online document...which has been very much streamlined which helps. But it's still a bit frustrating in that you...can only supply 10 documents on that, which if you're supplying three months of multiple bank accounts, you can't always fit that on. You can add it on to a continuation but it's not the easiest." [Student 7]

The university's role

While the results of the project have, thus far, been discussed separately, it is worth considering the relationship between the role of the university, the factors influencing students' food access, and the impacts of food insecurity.



1 Through providing services and support, the university - intentionally and unintentionally - shapes factors across different environments, and thus plays a role in students' ability to access and afford food. While the university is responsible for shaping the university food environment, it can also shape students' personal environment, through the provision of advice, training, or financial aid. The university can also potentially shape the wider contextual environment through lobbying the government to enact policies that support students. How (or whether) universities can intervene in students' social environment is another question, one that is worth addressing in future research.

2 As has been discussed throughout this report, there are a range of factors across multiple environments that can act as barriers or enablers of students' ability to access and afford food.

3 The impacts of food insecurity may alter students' personal and social environments, which could further exacerbate food insecurity. Consider as an example a food-insecure student who feels less able to partake in social activities with their friends. By self-selecting out of social interactions, this student may become socially isolated, with weaker social relationships and less social support available to help mitigate the impacts of food insecurity.

Conclusion

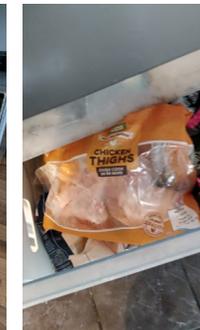
This project is the first known academic study to take a qualitative approach to exploring student food insecurity at a UK university. Of the eight students interviewed, half could be classified as experiencing food insecurity. This is negatively impacting their university experience through social and health impacts.

While financial factors play a significant role in students' ability to access and afford food, they are not the only factors. Instead, a range of factors across the personal, social, physical, and contextual environments have a role to play. Due to complex interactions across and within these environments, it is difficult to definitively say which is most important in influencing students' ability to access and afford food.

What is obvious, however, is that if student food insecurity is viewed through the narrow lens of financial accessibility, interventions and policies to support students may fail to adequately address the numerous and interacting barriers which cause students to struggle to access and afford food.

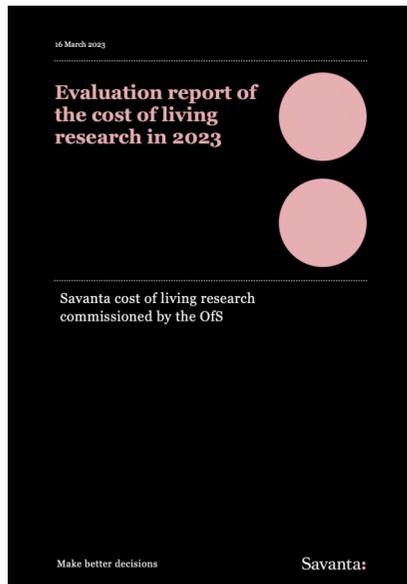
Recommendations

- 1 Recognise that some Exeter students struggle to access and afford food, which can negatively impact their physical health, mental wellbeing, and social life.
- 2 Understand that a wide range of factors can impact students' ability to access and afford food.
- 3 Ensure that interventions to address student food insecurity go beyond financial measures.
- 4 Conduct further research to understand the scope of student food insecurity on Exeter's campuses.
- 5 Consider alternative suppliers for the on-campus shop in Penryn that would allow for more affordable options.



References and other resources

1. FAO, 2017. *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2017*. Rome: FAO.
2. Hagedorn-Hatfield et al., 2022. A Decade of College Student Hunger: What We Know and Where We Need to Go. *Frontiers in Public Health*, **10**, 837724.
3. Aldubaybi et al., 2022. The prevalence of food insecurity among UK university students. In: *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. Presented at the Nutrition Society Summer Conference 2022: Food and Nutrition, pathways to a sustainable future, 12-15 July 2022, Sheffield Hallam University.
4. Armstrong et al., 2023. *Exploring food behaviours in the UK student population: Interim findings*. London: Food Standards Agency.
5. Savanta, 2023. *Evaluation report of the cost of living research in 2023: Savanta cost of living research commissioned by the OfS*. Bristol: Office for Students.
6. The Sutton Trust, 2023. *Cost of Living 2023 - University Students: Savanta polling*. London: The Sutton Trust.
7. Cafiero et al., 2022. *Access to food in 2021: filling data gaps Results of twenty national surveys using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation.



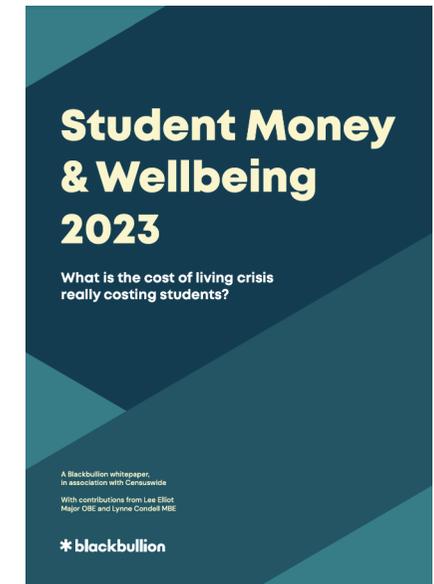
DOWNLOAD



DOWNLOAD



DOWNLOAD



DOWNLOAD



Report created by Veronica White



**University
of Exeter**