

# Food Standards Agency:

## Food Insecurity, Safety and Dietary Intake of UK Students

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### Project Objectives

The Food Standards Agency is an independent government organisation whose main priority is ensuring the UK contains only 'Food we can trust'. There is a need for social research in this field as policy recommendations and priorities stem for the current and future concerns and behaviours of the general public.

During my internship I conducted a research project which aimed to explore the unique barriers and vulnerabilities that students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland face regarding food insecurity and food safety. Students are often an overlooked group in policy research, yet they face a complex interaction of life transitions.

Understanding in this field is currently more important than ever following the COVID-19 pandemic as there is heightened awareness and concern around hygiene and food safety.

### "Did you know?"

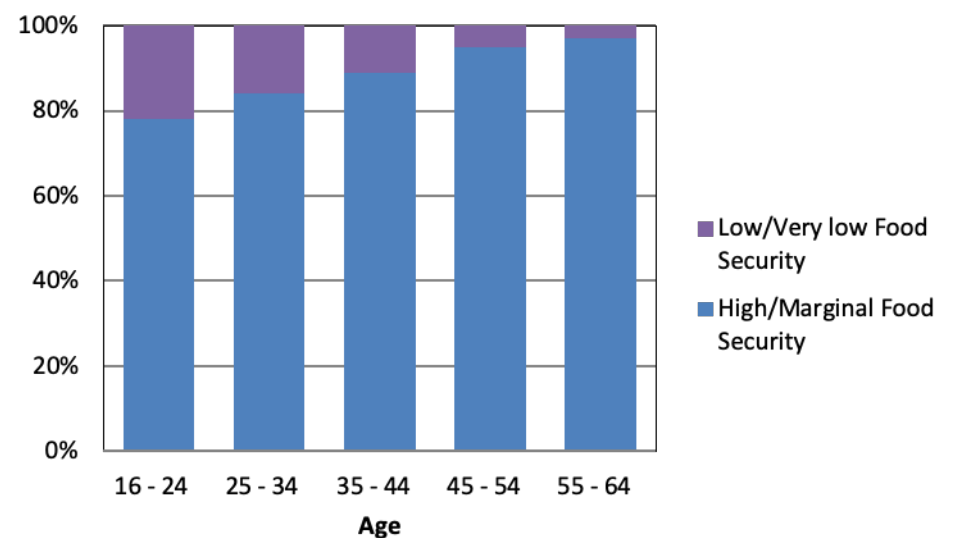
*Young people have disproportionately been affected by food insecurity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with 27% of food bank users in December 2020 being made up of 16-24 year olds.*

### Data Analysis

With use of SPSS I analysed the FSA's flagship survey 'Food & You 2'. By filtering the survey data to focus on students, I carried out logistic regressions, tests of significance and produced a research synthesis in order to identify the ways in which student behaviours differ from other demographics.

### Findings

- Young people have experienced high levels of food insecurity throughout 2020, yet were the least likely to be referred to a food bank, thus placing them at risk of not being supported.
- Students struggle creating and maintaining food-related habits after moving out the parental home which can lead to the formation of unsustainable and food insecure behaviours.



Graph showing the percentage of respondents from each age group who are considered to have high to marginal vs low to very low food security.

Data from: Food Standards Agency, Food & You 2 (wave 1)

- Students and young adults express more concern over personal and short-term food-related issues as opposed to wider societal issues such as climate change or the global warming. Financial restraints were often provided as a reason for this, and there was a strong influence from social media and current trends.
- Negative health and food changes that were prevalent in the student population were also identified in other demographics experiencing life transitions, such as widowhood, divorce and new parenthood.
- In November 2020, concern around food affordability for 16-24 year olds was more than 3 times that of 55-75 year olds, at 38% and 11% respectively.

### "So what next?"

- Focus on hygiene, especially correct handwashing practices.
- Education on safe storage of food, especially in shared student accommodation.
- Education on food safety, especially understanding of use-by dates and a best before date.
- Gaining young people's attention on wider societal food issues, such as sustainability and the food chain.

Following my internship the FSA has published a 'student guide to food safety' addressing many of these concerns, which can be found at: [www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/student-guide-to-food-safety-and-hygiene](http://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/student-guide-to-food-safety-and-hygiene).