

Food behaviours in the UK student population: executive summary

Results available: Results available

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Research topics: [Food hygiene](#) , [Food safety](#) , [Social science](#)

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Introduction

Given the lack of evidence on this topic, co creation sessions were held with university students to identify key issues and inform the development of a nationally representative online survey. This report presents the main findings from the co-creation sessions and headline findings from the online survey. The full analysis, which will include results from image coding using the citizen science platform [Zooniverse \(Opens in a new window\)](#), will be published at a later date.

Methodology

Sixteen university students took part in co-creation sessions (held between July and December 2021) to inform the development of an online survey. The online survey was conducted between the 2nd and 28th of February 2022. A nationally representative sample of 2,921 undergraduate university students were recruited across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. The survey included a range of themes including knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, relating to food safety, food security, diet, and other food-related topics.

Key findings

- a third (33%) of respondents reported that they do not always wash their hands immediately after handling raw meat, poultry, or fish, and 54% of respondents reported that they do not always wash their hands after handling frozen chicken products
- over half (54%) of respondents' report washing raw chicken at least occasionally

- many respondents store their food in an allocated area in their fridge, with 48% storing food on an allocated shelf or 13% using an allocated drawer. Over a quarter (28%) of respondents store food wherever there is space, and only 21% store different types of food in specific areas of the fridge (for example, ready-to-eat foods on the top shelf)
- around two-thirds (65%) of respondents reported that their fridge had contained food past the use-by date, 64% reported leftovers that had been left for more than two days, and 37% reported uncovered (cooked or raw) meats
- some respondents stored food at room temperature in their bedroom or non-kitchen area, which should be kept in a fridge (9%), or freezer (6%).
- almost 4 in 10 (37%) respondents reported that they have got food from the bins or waste area of a supermarket or shop
- over 4 in 10 (44%) respondents were classified as food insecure, with the highest levels (60%) noted amongst students at Universities based in the North West of England.

Conclusion

This research explored the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of university students relating to food safety, food security, diet and other food related behaviours, and identified experiences and challenges faced by this group. We have identified that students:

- find it difficult to maintain cleanliness in shared kitchens, with many students not following recommended food safety and hygiene behaviours, and some students engaging in food-related behaviours in non-kitchen areas.
- lack adequate fridge space, with often an 'one shelf per person' allocation,
- access food from the bins or waste area of a supermarket or shop (37%).
- have relatively high levels of food insecurity (44%), compared to the most recent national statistic from [Food and You 2](#) (Wave 4, 18%, for adults in England, Wales and Northern Ireland), particularly amongst students at Universities based in the North West of England (60%).