

CHILDREN'S FUTURE FOOD INQUIRY

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT FOOD



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Foreword



Corey speaking about food poverty on her local radio station

Taking part in the Children's Future Food Inquiry has allowed me to talk about my own personal experiences of food poverty, having my voice heard made me feel empowered as it's not often people listen.

Most young people don't have to do anything at home and many get the luxurious life; but not for me. My mum has got a disability, she suffers from epilepsy which means she cannot go near a hot pan as she may burn herself if she suddenly has a fit. It means I'm constantly cleaning and looking after my younger brothers who are nine and twelve. I cook for them most days and I have a friend who does most of the food shopping for me.

Sometimes when there isn't enough food to eat I invite my friends round so they can buy me 'scran'.

I didn't realise I was experiencing food poverty, to me not having enough food is my normal. But then I started to notice my friends had money to spend on food and I didn't.

I want to challenge the stigma around food poverty and encourage others to have conversations about it. I feel I have the power to make changes not only in my local area but nationally.

It's not right young people go hungry, or can't access or afford the food they like or want. By speaking out we can change this, after all nothing is more powerful than hearing a story from a mouth that has experienced hunger.

**Corey McPartland, 15,
from Darwen**

Executive Summary

Over 300 young people across the country have come together to have their voices heard on how poverty affects what they eat.

The school aged children took part in workshops across the UK to discuss their understanding and experience of food insecurity and food poverty and to gather their ideas for solutions to create a stable future food situation for others.

Young people we spoke to want schools to consider price, portion size and cultural and dietary requirements in the meals they offer, and provide a dedicated hunger teacher to deal with food poverty issues.

They are also calling for families to support each other with the purchasing and preparation of food, and be more open about hunger issues so they can be dealt with before they become serious.

Finally, the young people want more responsibility and accountability in regards to how food is advertised and presented on television and across social media, to prevent unrealistic expectations.

This report has been created from authentic young voices and is an accurate representation of modern views on hunger, experiences of food and food poverty. They ask that you use their findings and help them bring about change.



Introduction

It is clear there is growing concern about the impact poverty has on the diets, health, development and wellbeing of children. Yet, until now, the children's own experiences and perspectives have been largely absent from policy thinking.

This work has been conducted as part of a Parliamentary Inquiry into Children's Future Food. It has the support of a cross party group of 14 parliamentarians and two All Party Parliamentary Groups.

The Food Foundation, which is coordinating the delivery of this inquiry, commissioned Fixers to consult with children across the UK. This report is the result of that consultation.

Fixers is a national charity working with marginalised and vulnerable young people who have confronted a major issue in their lives and, consequently, want to share their experience in order to help others in a similar predicament, breaking down barriers of isolation to counter a sense of helplessness, defying the popular perception their voices have little or no value.

The Children's Future Food Inquiry will report its conclusions and recommendations later this year. We hope it will drive significant action to improve children's food across the UK.



Methods

A team of trained 'Young Person Coordinators' travelled across the four nations holding workshops with school children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The aim of these workshops was to find out more about how young people experience food at home, in school and in the media.

In total, 13 workshops were conducted with over 300 school-aged children aged between 11 and 16. Many of the young people involved came from deprived backgrounds and were entitled to free school meals.

To begin with the young people were asked to discuss their thoughts on food insecurity in

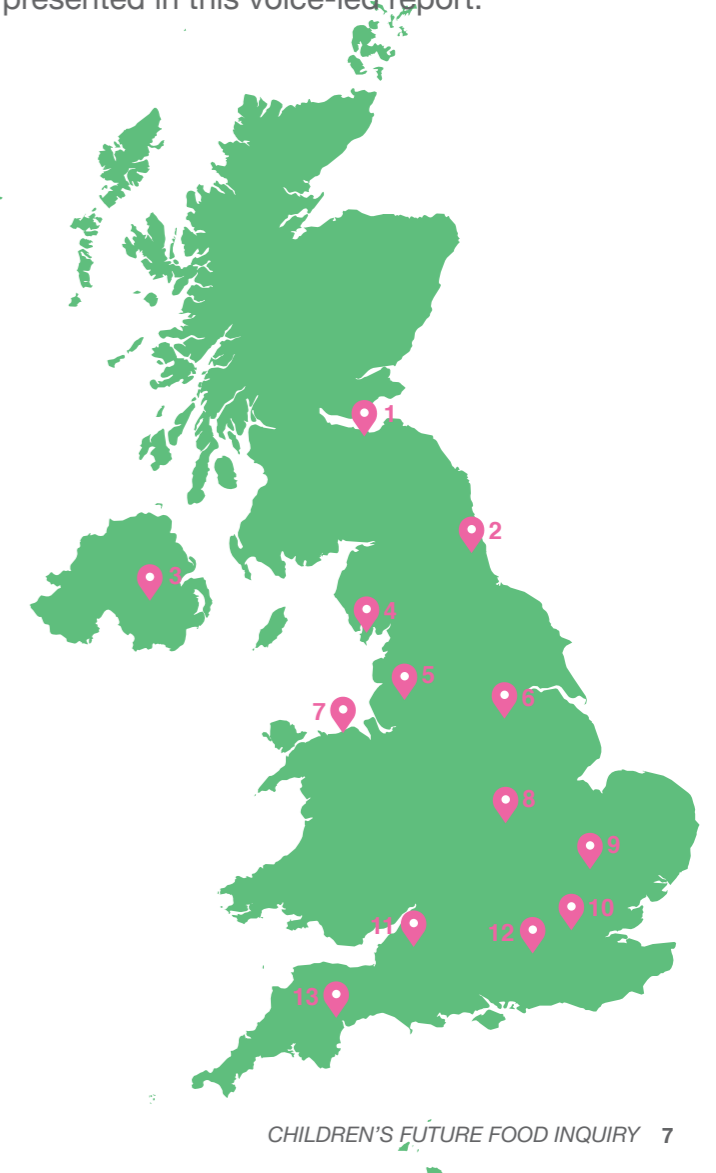
general, what they thought it meant and what they believed the solutions to be. The conversations were skilfully guided on to school and their experiences of food there. The young people were asked to recall times they or their friends had been hungry at school; discuss the factors surrounding this and consider the solutions.

The workshops also included conversations about how food affects home life and relationships with friends and family as well as how it is portrayed in the media.

Key themes and findings from these workshops were analysed and presented in this voice-led report.

WORKSHOP LOCATIONS

1. Edinburgh, Scotland
2. Byker, Newcastle Upon Tyne
3. Portadown, Northern Ireland
4. Barrow-in-Furness
5. Darwen
6. Doncaster
7. Prestatyn
8. Leicester
9. Leicester
10. Ham, London
11. Radstock
12. Exeter
13. Woking





EDUCATION

Given the amount of time young people spend in education it is only natural they feel strongly about the provision of food at school.

For many pupils, their daily reality is arriving at school having had nothing to eat and no money in their pockets to buy a snack at break time. They spend the entire morning unable to concentrate in class, counting down the hours to their free school meal. But even this is fraught with complications. Children have reported long queues in the school canteen which means they don't have time to eat before the next class. Frequently the schools run out of food before everyone has eaten, forcing children to go back into the classroom on an empty stomach with no energy to learn.

Quality of food

The young people we spoke to all had a strong sense of what foods were good for you and what foods were bad. They all understood the importance to their long-term health of eating a healthy, balanced diet, and discussed the long-term health implications of eating foods high in fats and salt.

Yet what they are offered at school is frequently all the foods they are told are bad for them. Time and time again, the young people talked

On top of this, the £2.30 young people on free school meals get for the day often doesn't cover a hot meal.

'Sometimes if you feel hungry it can make you feel sick and you can pass out in lessons. PE is particularly difficult if you are hungry.'

'If you don't eat enough at lunch it makes you tired, it messes with your brain as you can't reach your full potential as you've not been fed.'

'If you were on free school dinners and the prices kept going up there would be less you could get for your money. You could get a panini but it wasn't enough to keep you full during the school day.'

about their frustrations at the poor quality of food on offer at school.

They are calling for schools to up their game and deliver healthy, nutritious meals within budget.

'At school food is crap. It's just fat in the bacon bun – no bacon. School food is not healthy.'

'Food at school is unhealthy, it's just like cardboard.'

A recent academic study looked into whether there was any direct link between the nutritional quality of food and the academic achievement of students. The results highlighted the beneficial effects of meal quality

on the achievement of young people in schools and concluded 'students at schools that contract with a healthy school-meal vendor score higher on achievement tests.'¹



Value for money

As well as questioning the quality of the food, students said what they got was never worth what they had paid, and portion sizes weren't adequate enough to sustain a child for the rest of the day.

On top of this, the financial limit placed on students receiving free school meals do not allow you to get a full meal; often students say they could buy hot food, but could not afford a drink with it or a snack at break time. Pupils also spoke about access to water fountains being restricted during lunchtime. This, coupled with their frequent vandalism, meant some went without drinks while others were forced to spend unnecessarily.

'You need about £5/£6 for a full meal: main, side, drink and dessert.'

'Water is £1.60 to buy.'

'I worked out that in my first few weeks of secondary school I was spending £25-£30 per week on school dinners.'

Exacerbating the issue is the continually changing prices at school. There is no security in the price of meals, and schools often change the cost of meals without any warning. The pupils have no say in these decisions, and it is hard to budget food when the prices are subject to change.

'When I was in Year 7 it was £1.50 for a baguette but they kept putting the prices up. By the time I left baguettes were up to £2.30.'

'The prices go up year on year.'

A 2018 report from Hampshire County Council² evaluated the increase in school dinner prices per year, revealing that the cost of free school meals rose from £2.10 in 2015 to £2.30 as of September 2018.

Awkward payment options

Aside from the price of the food, the young people we spoke to detailed occasional issues with school payment methods. Most students said their school did not allow pupils to pay for food with cash, instead relying on electronic systems such as cards or fingerprint scanners which require topping up in order for pupils to get food.

It's widely acknowledged this system has gone some way to reducing the stigma associated with being a beneficiary of free school meals. But, when the money on these accounts runs out, children would like to be able to use cash, so they can buy food while they wait for their parents to top up their accounts. It would also be helpful

in situations where the top-up machines are broken.

A lot of pupils reported that their schools impose limits on these accounts, so students can only spend a certain amount of money in a day. These limits usually stand at around £5, and if people are hungry but have already spent their daily limit, they cannot get any more food.

'All our food is paid for on a card, no cash. You can forget your pin, or the machine you use to add money can break down; there's a huge queue to add money, then a huge queue to get food, and you only have 20 minutes for lunch sometimes.'



A dedicated hunger teacher

'Nobody is ensuring everyone has something to eat.'

Young people we spoke to felt schools did not hold anyone responsible for issues relating to food. Children are coming to school without breakfast, no money for snacks, and if they are on free school meals, the money they receive will not cover enough food for them to feel satisfied.

While most schools do offer certain support systems, such as the opportunity for students to borrow money from the school office if they do not have enough for lunch, children have highlighted how difficult it can be to approach adults about food issues for fear of being judged.

'When we were in primary school, we were monitored. At secondary school there isn't any monitoring,

so it's hard to track how people eat, and if they are eating enough or eating the right foods.'

Some students did say teachers had helped them in the past, by lending them money or buying them lunch when they didn't have anything to eat, but it wasn't something they wanted to rely on. In general, they indicated they would feel more comfortable speaking to a friend than a teacher about hunger issues.

They suggested the presence of a dedicated hunger teacher who was there to deal with these issues would make it easier to talk about hunger problems. Also, by placing a staff member in the dining room, it would give the school a better understanding of which pupils were struggling with food issues and allow them to implement more effective ways of dealing with problems in future.

Pride

‘People don’t always even apply for free school meals even though they’d be entitled to them. It’s about people’s pride.’

The children emphasised how the stigma surrounding food poverty prevents them from seeking help. They felt if schools made more of an effort to educate pupils about food poverty and food banks, people would feel less ashamed about approaching adults for help if they have no food. More understanding on the issue would also reduce schoolyard bullying stemming from ignorance around those in less fortunate circumstances, and generally make life at school easier.

When discussing times where they had struggled with food issues themselves, pupils revealed in most cases, they would sooner ask a friend for help than ask a teacher or borrow money from the office, and most said they had lent money to those in need. In some cases, children can feel so embarrassed about asking for help they sometimes just don’t eat, to avoid having to admit they don’t have any money for lunch.

‘Sometimes you don’t have enough to buy much food. It can be embarrassing if you have to ask them (school staff) to take money out next time there’s money on the card.’



Different rules for everyone

Children also said it was difficult for adults to understand food poverty issues when the same rules don’t apply to both pupils and staff.

Students highlighted how the teachers don’t have to wait in line at dinner and often don’t pay for their food, meaning they don’t need to worry about what they eat at lunchtimes.

Also, what the teachers eat is often different to what is offered to the students, which pupils say is frustrating, creating a sense of inequality that is unnecessary. They expressed a desire for the food to be the same for everyone.

‘Some dinner-ladies cook the teachers different meals or save them food.’

Limited lunch breaks

Long queues and limited lunch breaks often mean students can struggle to get lunch in enough time, occasionally leading to pupils missing lunch altogether and being irritable and unable to concentrate for the rest of the day.

‘The queues at lunchtime are too long at school. You wait half your lunch break to get food and by the time you get to the front there is no choice left.’

The effect waiting in queues has on food availability is another reason pupils want teachers to be subject to the same rules. Staff members jumping queues means there is less choice for the students who have to wait to eat, and the group want the staff to be aware of how their own habits at lunch time affect the students. Another issue is in schools where different year groups have different dinner times, those eating later are often left with little or no food choice.

‘Sometimes year groups don’t eat because there is nothing left for them. There needs to be more food and there needs to be longer lunch breaks.’

This problem is made worse for those students who are put in detention, as they often do not get a chance to get anything to eat before classes begin again. Students feel there is no consideration that lunchtimes are necessary for student wellbeing and that missing lunch effects concentration for the rest of the day; especially if children hadn’t eaten breakfast as well.

‘If you’re put in isolation for a day or a week, you’re not allowed in the canteen at all. You can take a packed lunch, but there sometimes isn’t any food at home to make one.’

Food in lessons

School days follow rigid timetables, and in general students are not given much flexibility in how they organise their days until they reach GCSE level and beyond. This can be problematic when it comes to food, as children are told they can only eat at certain times, regardless of their situation.

At an age where pupils are continually growing, the wait until dinner time can be a long time to go without food. This is especially apparent for those who expend a lot of energy from breakfast walking or cycling to school, or for those who skipped breakfast altogether. The students we spoke to largely resented that snacking in lessons is prohibited.

‘We’re not prisoners; we shouldn’t have set times for meals.’

The rules on what foods can be consumed and when the students are allowed to eat them can be quite stringent, with different schools enforcing different rules. However, most children reported not being able to eat any food in lessons, and those that could were only allowed to eat fruit. The same rules applied to liquids, with most pupils being required to ask a teacher before being allowed to have a drink, which in most cases had to be water and nothing else.

As a result, a lot of children say they ignore the rules and eat food anyway, simply because they are hungry and cannot wait until the allotted meal times.

‘We’re not allowed to eat in class – I do anyway.’



Dietary and cultural requirements

At school, it is generally a case of ‘you get what you’re given.’ The young people we spoke to raised frustrations about not being consulted on the menu or price of food. It is something they desperately want to change in order to ensure they are getting meals at school that are nutritious and satisfying.

‘They should ask us what we actually want to eat at school, not just give us what they think.’

They also feel no provisions are made for those with particular eating requirements, whether these are down to preference, health or culture. For example, Muslim students have highlighted how there isn’t always a Halal option provided at school, and what vegetarian options are available are very limited.

‘You do get a choice, but I don’t like quite a lot. I’ve spoken to the principal about the food not being cooked properly. He says they’re working on it, which means nothing is going to change.’

More effort needs to be made on behalf of teaching staff to recognise cultural practices such as fasting. Religious students have a right to eat in accordance with their beliefs during festivals such as Ramadan, and some students explained the effect not eating can have on concentration and academic performance is not always recognised.

‘I feel sorry for people who are fasting; you see people who are fasting passing out. Some get excused from PE while others don’t. Some get yelled at. The teachers need to understand.’

Highlights

- For schools to provide a dedicated ‘hunger teacher’, who monitors school dinners and finance issues and supervises the dining hall to better understand food insecurity issues.
- To review school dinner prices and payment options, to ease the burden on less fortunate students.
- Better quality food, with more choices that consider dietary and cultural requirements, and more support offered to teachers in relation to these issues.
- For children to be made more aware of hunger issues at school, so they better understand the situations of others, and to reduce the stigma around asking for help when eating properly becomes an issue.



HEALTH

The price of health

One of the biggest issues raised by the children is that healthy options at school are few and far between, and are often more expensive than the unhealthy ones, meaning there is no incentive for them to eat properly. They face the same issues of affordability at home.

In 2016, the government published its Eatwell guide, which outlines the optimum diet for the population to ensure everyone is getting the right nutrients and maintaining a balanced lifestyle. It provides recommendations across five food groups: Fruit and veg, carbohydrates, oils and spreads, dairy and proteins.

However, the Food Foundation published a report in September 2018³ stating the cost of maintaining such a diet would cost an adult on average £5.99 a day, or £41.93 per week. The report went on to say the guidelines were not affordable for the majority of low income families, comparing the cost of following the Eatwell guide to household

expenditure and disposable income figures to conclude that '26.9% of households would need to spend more than a quarter of their household income after housing costs' to meet these requirements. On top of this, it was found only 53% of households in the UK meet these requirements every week.⁴

When speaking to pupils from different schools across the UK, many expressed awareness that the cost of food had an effect on their diet, and admitted to knowing about family financial issues regarding food.

'My mum gets £60 and my dad gets £200 through benefit, it's not enough money for two weeks. Once you've paid the bills there is not enough for food.'

'If a parent isn't earning, you're going to be fed cheaper foods. The food is more unhealthy; tinned, instant and frozen foods.'

'I think a lot of people hide it. They get embarrassed about not having money.'

Food choice down to parents

Children are largely reliant on their parents for food, with adults controlling what food is bought, cooked, and consumed by their children. While most students indicated some cooking ability, knowing how to make simple meals like pasta and baked beans on toast, many admitted they had no say in what food was bought and provided by their parents. As a result, a lot of the children expressed a dislike for what they were served at home, and wished what they were given was more diverse.

'My mum has set things she likes to cook, so she cooks whatever she wants. If you don't like it then hard luck, you either eat it or you don't, there's no alternative. She needs to change the menu.'

Children are seemingly not encouraged by their parents to get involved with preparing food in the house, with it being common for kids to stay at home while their parents do a weekly shop.

In surveys conducted with young people taking part in the Future Food workshops, children were asked which foods their parents were most likely to buy from the supermarket.

Of the 240 respondents...



Busy lifestyles

A large factor in what food is prepared at home is the work schedules and personal situations of individual families. For parents who work, they don't always have time to come home and prepare a large home-cooked meal for their family. This leaves children in the position of having to eat less nutritious ready meals or fast food, or cook meals for themselves due to their parents' time constraints. In this case, children often eat a lot of the same things, especially if they have limited cooking skills.

Hectic days can also affect a parents' mood, meaning they do not feel like making anything out of tiredness or frustration, and this also leads to the consumption of frozen foods, ready meals, and takeaways.



'There is not enough time to make food at home. Lifestyles can mean you have to eat on the run or have ready meals that don't have nutrients in them.'

Many of the students indicated wanting to learn to cook different meals, and for schools to provide necessary culinary education, so they can begin to prepare a more varied diet and be more self-sufficient in situations where their parents are not present.

'It would be helpful if someone showed us how to cook. I can't cook anything.'



Eating as a family

One side effect of busy lifestyles is families are less likely to sit and eat together, something which the students said was an important part of family life. They showed a desire to sit and socialise with their family as a way to bond with each other, although some said they ate at different times or sat away from their family, for various reasons. In some cases, students said they didn't share a meal at home because their families were small, or because it was just them and a single parent, so a big table did not seem necessary.

'You know how some families bond over a meal? If you don't have that it can affect your family life.'

'I eat up in my room; my dad goes out to his caravan to eat.'

Mealtimes can also be tricky due to the different tastes of individual family members. Dislikes, allergies and dietary requirements means cooking one meal for all isn't always possible, and this can lead to fragmented meals.

Some reported eating meals separately because they did not like what was being cooked, preparing something for themselves or just grabbing a quick snack.

'My mum does slimming world and she cooks loads of their meals and

they taste awful so I don't eat them. I eat on my own.'

'My sister is really picky and I try and eat healthy but if she doesn't like something she will refuse to eat. So my mum has to find foods that she likes.'

Pressure

When asked in workshops whose responsibility it was to provide food, the majority said it was down to their parents to make sure children had the right food to eat, and 62% said children should go to parents first if they had any worries about their health with regards to food.

Despite this, a number of the students indicated that the responsibility for the cooking in the house falls solely on their shoulders, in some cases preparing food for their whole family because they are the only ones willing or able to do it.

While this is largely down to the busy schedules of parents, some children are full-time carers for their parents; putting added pressure

on them to make sure the family is eating. In these cases, they often do the food shopping as well, making the responsibility of food in their house completely down to them, whether they are prepared for it or not.

'I choose what we eat because I cook it. I'm my mum's carer because she has epilepsy, and if she had a fit while cooking she would scald or hurt herself. So I cook for me and my little brothers, but I don't really know how.'

'It's a big problem if your parents work a lot; then you don't eat properly or at the right times.'



Stigma

This responsibility can be a lot for young people, and just as students admitted to feeling embarrassed when talking about food issues at school, there were similar sentiment about discussing food issues at home.

Many of the children present expressed concern for someone they knew regarding their food situations; citing their friends' financial situations or family issues as reasons for worrying about them.

Socially, food worries are prevalent for young people, due to the way in which children compare themselves to their friends. In every workshop, the children mentioned how their

meals compared to their friends, and how this made them feel.

'I had chicken and turkey at Christmas and it was embarrassing because my pal had a wee steak pie.'

In cases where they were worried about food issues, children admitted to feeling anxious about inviting their friends round to eat for fear there wouldn't be enough food.

'I've heard my friends make up excuses about why they can't join in and invite friends round for their tea. They say they're going out with their family or whatever.'

Food Banks

During the workshops, young people talked about ways they could help their peers who are struggling with food. A common conversation revolved around food banks, and how those struggling to feed their families could go to them for staple foods and ingredients. Some said they had family members who had relied on them, while others said they wanted to volunteer at food banks and agreed they benefitted those in need of food.

'I would like to work at a food bank because I like helping people. At Christmas we made boxes with meat and food to help the needy.'

However, there was still a lot of uncertainty about food banks, with many not knowing where local ones were and how they operated. As a result, a popular recommendation was for children to be more educated about food banks and food poverty in general, so they could become aware of the support networks in place. Again, the topic of embarrassment came up regularly, indicating a stigma surrounding seeking help from services like food banks, something which the students want to change.

'I didn't know there was a food bank near me; I thought it was a shelter.'

'I've never been to a food bank.'

Other forms of support

Support doesn't always have to come from the council or from charities. The young people we spoke to suggested more could be done closer to home to make sure everyone is eating properly. A selection of students were encouraged and supported in growing their own food with their families, providing a fresh source of food at a fraction of the cost of a supermarket. There was a resulting sense of pride amongst those children who sourced and cooked for themselves. However, allotments come with their own costs and without a garden this isn't feasible for everyone. People also suggested fishing as an option for families who wanted fresh ingredients but didn't want to pay shop prices, but

like crop-growing, fishing comes with its own equipment costs. Both activities also require surplus time.

Students all agreed families should do more to support each other. A lot of young people said they enjoyed going to their grandparents' house because they ate a lot better there than they did at home, having more home-cooked and nutritious meals. It was largely agreed if family members took more notice of each other's needs then they could find ways to prevent food poverty issues before they become more serious.

'When my brother gets paid he just buys more tracksuits and jeans and he has loads already. He should help other people out a bit more.'



Highlights

- More education about food banks and support services, so families know where they can go to get staple foods when they are struggling to feed themselves.
- Openness within families regarding personal food situations, so they can better support each other and tackle food poverty issues before they become serious.
- For the government to be more understanding of everyday financial hardships, and to stop putting unrealistic pressure on those who cannot afford to follow their nutrition guidelines.



MEDIA

Food insecurity is something that undoubtedly affects students both at home and at school, changing the way they view their home lives and the situations of their friends and peers. However, these worries are amplified further by the way food is depicted in their favourite media; from the meals they see in films, to the adverts they see on TV, to the food they see in channels and posts on social media platforms.

However, they also discussed how many shows present an unrealistic or unhealthy view of food. Professional cooking shows such as Masterchef, Hell's Kitchen and the Great British Bake Off rely on expensive equipment and costly ingredients and so do not reflect how the majority of people eat. Shows like Man Vs Food could encourage over-eating and promote unhealthy practices at home.

The young people were quick to point out the shows they believed portrayed positive attitudes towards food, whether this by promoting healthy eating, or by giving tips on how to save money on shopping and cooking.

'Some media is good because it promotes home cooking.'

'Programmes like Eat Well for Less and Eat Shop Save are good because they encourage healthy eating at reasonable costs.'



72%

believed the

portrayal of food & meal times

on TV is unrealistic



Adverts

The most unrealistic portrayal of food was said to come from adverts, which are predominantly for fast foods. McDonald's, KFC and Domino's adverts are aired constantly, making children want to eat those foods as opposed to healthier and cheaper alternatives. Also, these adverts never reflect the true quality of the product, with a lot of young people saying they were disappointed when they bought this food because it wasn't the same as the advert.

'You go to McDonalds and it's so small compared to the adverts. It's pathetic really.'

Even adverts that aren't for fast food can be unhelpful to those struggling with food issues. Marks and Spencer for example entices viewers with pictures of mouth-watering fresh food which for many is beyond what they can afford and not easy to buy on a budget.

'My parents get depressed with food adverts; they can't afford it.'

The predominance of unhealthy adverts over ones focused on fresh, affordable food is something the young people want to change, pointing out McDonald's adverts even appear on bus tickets, which a lot of students buy multiple times a day. They want to see adverts which are more balanced and promote nutritious food. They also pointed out no adverts show hunger is an issue here in the UK.

'You see adverts about helping people who are going hungry in Africa, but not here and it's still happening in the UK.'

Social Media

Technology has ensured young people are constantly connected; not just to each other, but to a myriad of celebrities and public figures who play a large part in influencing their behaviour. Sites like Instagram are becoming increasingly popular for food sites and blogs, and the students did have positive things to say about how social media can help widen their understanding of food. Along with Snapchat, the platform is a helpful place to source recipes and food ideas, and can contribute to young people attempting to cook new things. It can also be a source of positive stories to do with food and body image, and so the view of social media is not a wholly negative one.

‘Sometimes it can be inspiring to see different recipes, but people can become obsessed too.’

However, the constant stream of updates from celebrity feeds and channels means young people are repeatedly subjected to pictures of food and drink these celebrities post. This in turn can lead to pressures to emulate their idols on food options and the way they eat. The students we spoke to

say this exposure was unhealthy in that it created unrealistic food expectations. They are calling for celebrities to be more responsible in what they post online.

‘Celebrities advertise certain types of cooking and it creates pressure and influences people. I don’t think you should ban celebrities from doing this, but there should be less of it.’

‘Social media is stupid; look at my caviar on toast and my private jet.’

However, it isn’t just celebrities who create pressure, with most of the students admitting to feeling jealous of food their friends have posted on their social media profiles. They also considered how their own innocent snaps of food may have more of an impact on people less fortunate than they might realise, and so they also called for young people on social media to be responsible for what they shared with their friends, and be more considerate of others.

‘You might be sat there with a Pot Noodle, looking at pictures of food online and it makes people feel sad, like they’re missing out because they can’t have nice food.’



Highlights

- More realistic representation of food on television, with programmes dedicated to promoting healthy and affordable meals for families to cook, in order to benefit everyday lifestyles.
- A more balanced selection of adverts, aimed at everyone; if fast food adverts were shown alongside media showing healthy alternatives, then it would encourage people to eat better and not rely so heavily on takeaway food.
- More responsibility and accountability in relation to what is posted about food online, whether this be from celebrities, or just in what young people post amongst their friends and peers, with the hope of erasing unrealistic expectations.



CONCLUSION

Despite coming from a variety of schools and backgrounds spanning the entirety of the UK, the different voices of the students we spoke to told the same stories about food insecurity, and how it pervades throughout every aspect of their personal lives, in ways in which they themselves may not have realised; from their experiences in the dining hall, to the way in which food is portrayed on TV and across their social media.

At school, the young people expressed a desire for widespread change across how food is priced, prepared and presented, calling for better quality food with options

that considered different dietary and cultural requirements. The general consensus is the food is unappetising and presented in portions too small to ensure children are full.

They also want the food to be more affordable, reflecting the size of the portions, and considerate of the fact those on free school meals often do not get enough money to buy a complete meal. The presence of a dedicated hunger teacher would also help the school monitor which students were struggling, and create more effective solutions to food poverty issues.



At home, the students wanted there to be more communication amongst families, calling for more openness about food poverty issues, so they can support each other and try to deal with any problems before they become serious. Families working together to help with the shopping and preparation of food would ease individual burdens, and eating together would help strengthen familial bonds.

A better knowledge of food banks and support services would also help ensure families had sufficient staple foods to feed themselves on a day to day basis, and hopefully reduce stigma surrounding seeking support with food provisions.

Popular media has a massive effect on how young people view food and diet, with an endless array of food programmes and adverts that promote unhealthy fast food or unaffordable dishes over nutritious, home-cooked options that could be prepared by the average family. A more balanced selection of adverts would encourage families to go for affordable options over unhealthy quick-fixes.

The way in which young people are so inter-connected on social media presents its own challenges, as they are in constant contact with food

related content. While this can be beneficial in exposing children to different food options, it can also foster unrealistic expectations of what they should be eating, with celebrities posting about expensive meals and featuring paid adverts for food companies. It can also create pressure and jealousy amongst friends and peers, with boastful food posts contributing to some children feeling left out.

They want people to be more responsible and accountable in terms of what they share online, being more considerate of how what they are posting can affect the less fortunate. A little consideration will help ease societal pressures relating to food, and the financial costs associated with it.

By compiling their concerns and experiences into this report, the young people hope to raise awareness of food insecurity and how it is pervasive across all aspects of their lives. By highlighting the changes they want made in education, at home and throughout popular media, they hope to start a serious conversation about the state of food insecurity in the UK, and begin to change the way it is perceived in order to make real change going forward.

Everyone has a right to eat properly, and seek help without judgement.

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