



Cost-of-living crisis: Example of practice

Coming together to address food and fuel poverty for learners due to the cost-of-living crisis

Queen Margaret University (QMU)

As part of our work on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students, we have published some examples of practice, provided by institutions, that have been implemented to support learners survive and thrive through the ongoing crisis. You can find more examples on our [web page](#).

Coming out of COVID and into the cost-of-living crisis, something that was noted by the University through various focus groups was that a high percentage of students felt lonely/isolated, and that there was a genuine desire to rebuild the QMU community that had been well established beforehand. In collaboration, both the University and our Students' Union (SU) came together to deliver what was named our 'TGIT' ([Thank Goodness It's Thursday Initiative](#)). This was organised initially by one of QMU's senior lecturers in psychology and aimed to rebuild the sense of community lost during the pandemic. Its main purpose, however, was to provide support for students who could not easily afford to heat their homes and have decent meals as a result of the surge in rent, gas, electricity, etc.

What did the University do to alleviate food and fuel poverty?

Every Thursday evening, QMU students, regardless of age, background, ethnicity, level of study, could turn off their lights, heating, etc, and join us in the University canteen for a free hot meal, cooked and provided by our catering company. This meal consisted of two courses - a main meal and soup to start - with vegetarian/vegan options available for those with specific dietary requirements. Staff volunteers from the University and the SU would come together to serve food, host activities and be on hand to chat to students. We also shared food packs that students could take home, consisting of different ingredients and a recipe card. Activities varied, with the SU hosting a clothes swap and a formal wear swap (Thank Frock It's Thursday) to sustainably provide pre-loved formal wear ahead of the upcoming annual Grand Ball, for students who could not afford to purchase new outfits due to the increased sum of money required for living.

What was the impact of this initiative?

This initiative has been a great success for the QMUSU/university team. TGIT was nominated for numerous [awards](#) and won the [Herald Higher Education's 'Supporting Student Wellbeing Award'](#). Along with many positive reviews from students, TGIT was given the greenlight to continue supporting students in 2023. To continue more sustainably, the decision was made to stop handing out food packs; however, in place of this, students could bring along tupperware so that they could take portions of hot food home with them to consume the following day. Each session, we were serving over 200 students weekly, peaking at over 300 students during our TGIT Christmas dinner. During this, the SU led a Christmas card exchange and, as an addition, purchased festive gifts for students who were unable to go home for the festive season. Overall, we believe that TGIT has been a great success and are working towards continuing its delivery.

What next?

The SU plan to meet with the University senior leadership team to work on ways that we can continue to deliver TGIT in a way that is sustainable and manageable. The helpers during the evening are all made up of SU and University staff/student officers who volunteer their time to help, so we are trying to come up with ways in which we can encourage other members of the community to join in. As we rely on funding for the University to make TGIT happen, we are working collaboratively to provide regular but cost-effective sessions going forward in the new academic year. The likely solution is to cut back on doing it once every week and strip it back to once a month, however this has not yet been set in stone. The SU are hoping that we can continue to support our students through this initiative and will continue to devise ideas as to how we make this possible.

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