



An Introduction To Brighton and Sussex Universities Food Network

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The Brighton and Sussex Universities Food Network (BSUFN) is a multi-disciplinary network which was established in 2012. It was initiated when researchers identified a gap between researchers working on different food-related topics, and between researchers and practitioners working in local community food initiatives. BSUFN has a particular interest in finding ways to improve the value of academic research on food for practitioners and policy makers. BSUFN provides a space for sharing ideas, experience and knowledge which is why it is called a 'knowledge centre'.

Food is a very diverse topic of interest to people in many different fields so BSUFN seeks to facilitate cross-disciplinary networking. BSUFN members currently come from the following fields:

- Health and nutritional sciences
- Social sciences
- Arts and humanities
- Life sciences and physical sciences

BSUFN members are keen to work with the local community and non-academic groups. Bringing people together – inside and outside universities – will help us identify common research goals, develop collaborations, and increase research impact.

Aim and Objectives of BSUFN

Aim

- To create a food-themed *Knowledge Centre*, where members can share knowledge and information across Brighton & Sussex Universities and the local community.

Objectives

- **Bringing people together** from different academic disciplines and the wider community, so they can work together on food-related projects
- **Developing the Universities' professional expertise in food**, e.g. by drawing in research students, enhancing teaching, and training researchers
- **Raising the profile** of the Universities' work and expertise in food-related research and teaching
- **Connecting** with local, national and international networks, as well as local ones
- **Attracting funding** to help members achieve these objectives
- **Making a contribution on campus**, doing food in new and better ways

BSUFN is responsive to the requests of members and, as such, the Aim and Objectives are reviewed and revised as necessary.

Topic-Related Special Interest Groups

BSUFN has six Special Interest Groups (SIGs), each focused on a different aspect of food. These subject themes are intentionally broad in order to encompass the diversity of food-related research taking place at Brighton and Sussex Universities while incorporating scope for engagement with community groups around these themes.

The six SIGs are:

- Food Health and Education
- Food Cultures and Technologies
- Global Food Nexus
- Primary Food Production
- Food Research Methods and Theories
- Food Policy and Governance

The SIGs support the network in identifying synergies in research and opportunities for collaboration among members, and provide an informal platform for BSUFN members to engage in topic-specific discussion and provide multi-disciplinary support.

Each SIG has representation on the steering group to ensure that BSUFN activities encompass the diversity of interests.

Existing Membership

BSUFN currently has over 140 members from 36 different academic departments and institutions and 17 non-academic organisations and groups. The academic institutions represented by existing members include five UK universities as well as members working at universities in the USA and Serbia. Furthermore, several of the non-academic organisations with members in BSUFN are national organisations rather than specifically local to East Sussex.

Some of the affiliations of current BSUFN members include:

- School of Global Studies, University of Sussex
- School of Business, Management and Economics, University of Sussex
- School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex
- College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton
- College of Social Sciences, University of Brighton
- College of Life, Health and Physical Sciences, University of Brighton
- Institute of Development Studies
- Brighton and Hove Food Partnership
- Food Matters

History of BSUFN

BSUFN was established in 2012 by two researchers based in SPRU (Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex) with the intention of bridging a gap between food-related researchers across multiple disciplines. Responsibility for administration and organisation of BSUFN has since changed hands and a steering group now takes on this role.

In May 2014 nearly 50 researchers from across Brighton and Sussex Universities came together to identify how to take BSUFN forward. The BSUFN Symposium in February 2015 catalysed interest in the activities of BSUFN and brought new members.

Activities and Achievements

To date, BSUFN has facilitated a variety of events, including two symposiums, workshops, seminars, field visits, interdisciplinary reading groups, and activity days with local community groups. In addition to this, BSUFN has established a website which functions as an online space for knowledge exchange and raising the profile of food-related research at Brighton and Sussex Universities. The website, along with an active Twitter account, has reached an international audience, significantly increasing the profile of BSUFN activities and local research.

The Future for BSUFN

There is consistently demand for events, research, networking, and opportunities which BSUFN is currently unable to facilitate. In order to respond fully to demands, BSUFN is looking to find ways to initiate, support and undertake collaborations between academic and non-academic members and local community groups. To this end, BSUFN has already identified topics that are locally salient, such as food poverty and food waste. Moreover, it has the potential to identify, from amongst its membership, partners with the relevant expertise to develop concrete proposals together on these topics.

Crucially, BSUFN knows from consulting its members that there is an appetite for this, especially from local non-academic organisations who lack both the resources to evaluate their own work in a robust way, and the time to engage in research that might improve their responsiveness to local needs. This is where collaboration can make a far-reaching impact to the quality of voluntary sector innovation, service delivery and campaigning. In addition, such collaboration offers researchers the opportunity for policy engagement and research impact. Through this BSUFN can contribute towards the creation of more sustainable food systems in East Sussex, and act as a beacon to initiatives elsewhere.

Value of BSUFN to Members

Current members consider that the value of the Network lies in its ability to

- Support networking and developing interdisciplinary relationships and researcher interactions;
- Support learning from other researchers and sharing of contemporary research;
- Support and develop collaborations between departments, disciplines, universities, and relevant community groups and organisations;
- Increase the profile of food-related research, events, and activities within Brighton & Hove and East Sussex.

The BSUFN Steering Group

The steering group consists of 12 BSUFN members who have volunteered to take on the administration of the network and the organisation of events and activities. Each of the six SIGs is represented on the steering group and there is also representation from undergraduate students and non-academic community organisations.

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