Background:
GPs are increasingly being asked to complete forms to enable their patients to access food banks. Over a million people accessed the services offered by food banks run by the Trussell Trust last year; up from 128,000 people in 2012\(^1\). We aimed to describe the characteristics of people attending a foodbank.

Methods: In May 2015 we conducted a questionnaire survey of attenders at the Vineyard Church food bank in Kent. The foodbank has a café and is open for two half days each week, one session mainly for mothers with children, the other for single people.

People attending the foodbank were approached by IB and asked if they were willing to complete a brief anonymous questionnaire. Those who agreed were offered help to complete it if necessary.

Results: The response rate was 91% (61/67) and 53% were women. Responders’ mean age was 47 years (range 21-74). Only 18% identified themselves as from an ethnic minority and most (77%) had at least one child (median two children, range 0 to 5). Most responders (82%) came to collect a food parcel every week. Nine percent said their highest qualification was a university degree, 10% had A levels or a BTec, 27% had GCSEs and 32% had NVQs or similar. Only 22% said they had no educational qualifications.

The majority (79%) of responders said they were receiving social benefits. Of 59% (36/61) who answered the question about employment, 83% of responders said they earned no money, and the average earnings of those in paid work was £204 (range £20-600) per week.

Discussion: Findings support a recent report\(^1\) that food bank users were more likely to be single adults or lone parents, to be unemployed, and
belonging to a low-income household. This is similar to many patients cared for by GPs in deprived areas.

References:
1) http://mkfoodbank.org.uk/about/stats-food-bank-facts-figures/
2) Toop L, Jackson C. Patient co-payment for general practice services: slippery slope or a survival imperative for the NHS? Br J Gen Pract. 2015 Jun