

**Food Hygiene Information Scheme Pilot
Research**

Report

Prepared for

**COI Communications
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On behalf of the Food Standards Agency

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1 Background and Methodology

a) Background and objectives

A short-term Stakeholder Working Group involving consumer, industry and enforcement representatives was convened by Food Standards Agency Scotland to consider issues surrounding the publication of hygiene information during 2005. The Group reported back to the Agency in November 2005 with a recommended framework for a pilot scoring scheme for food premises, which would include information available both at the premises and on the Internet.

Food Standards Agency Scotland set up a stakeholder Steering Group to progress this pilot scheme. This report has been commissioned to provide an interim evaluation of the pilot scheme.

It was launched on 6th November 2006 with the title of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to provide consumers with simplified information about catering and retail outlets with regards to food hygiene and has arisen initially from consumer associations and latterly from the steering group. The objectives of the pilot scheme are to:

- ▶ Provide information to consumers in a way that's simple to understand and available at the premises and on the web site
- ▶ Drive up standards by encouraging businesses to comply with hygiene legislation
- ▶ To ensure that the public is adequately informed about the aims and nature of the scheme prior to inception

Five Local Authorities in Scotland are piloting the scheme, namely: Perth & Kinross Council, Aberdeen City Council, City of Edinburgh Council, Fife Council and Renfrewshire Council. Each Local Authority has written to catering and retail establishments in their selected pilot area to inform them about the new scheme and included a leaflet about the scheme and copies of information made available to consumers about the scheme. In addition, there was localised media activity at the time including radio advertisements and press articles.

Each catering or retail establishment is issued with a certificate indicating whether they are a 'Pass' or 'Improvement Required', while those yet to be inspected will have a temporary certificate: 'Awaiting Inspection'. Caterers and retailers are encouraged to display the certificate prominently in the outlet (preferably on the front window), but this is not compulsory and it appears that the majority are not doing so. In addition, each of the five local authorities have been asked to create a section within their website which consumers can access and check the status of every catering and retail establishment in the pilot area (although each local authority has discretion as to how they do this).

Research was required to understand how the scheme has worked so far so that lessons can be learned to shape the post launch pilot. More specifically, the key research objectives were to:

- ▶▶ Measure consumer awareness of the scheme
- ▶▶ Understand consumer reactions to the scheme and the perceived benefits
- ▶▶ Assess consumer reactions to the information about caterers and retailers contained within the Local Authority websites, and identify relative likes/dislikes and potential improvements
- ▶▶ Understand business reactions to the scheme and associated communications i.e. letter and leaflets
- ▶▶ Assess the impact of the scheme on businesses in terms of their current behaviour and future intentions
- ▶▶ Assess whether businesses are displaying their certificates and reasons for doing so/not doing so
- ▶▶ Identify any preferences in the different Local Authority approaches among businesses
- ▶▶ Assess the views of the relevant people within the local authorities and understand what they thought worked well/didn't work well and how they would like to improve working methods.

b) Research methodology

An extensive methodology was used, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and covering all key audience types i.e. the businesses affected by the scheme, consumers living and/or working in those pilot areas and key representatives from the five local authorities.

Quantitative research was conducted as follows:

- ▶▶ 300 15-minute telephone (CATI) interviews with retail and catering establishments affected by the pilot scheme (from sample provided by the local authorities)
 - ▶ 50 interviews in each of Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen City, Fife and Renfrewshire; and 100 interviews in Edinburgh City
- ▶▶ 404 short on-site audits among retail and catering establishments affected by the pilot scheme to check whether businesses were displaying their certificates (picked randomly from sample provided)

- ▶ A minimum of 70 audits in each of Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen City, Fife and Renfrewshire; and 100 audits in Edinburgh City
- ▶▶ 300 10-minute face-to-face interviews with consumers living and/or working in the pilot areas
 - ▶ 50 interviews in each of Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen City, Fife and Renfrewshire; and 100 interviews in Edinburgh City

Follow-up **qualitative** research was conducted as follows:

- ▶▶ 10 telephone in-depth interviews with retail and catering establishments affected by the pilot scheme (2 in each of the 5 local authorities)
- ▶▶ 5 telephone in-depth interviews with local authorities: one key person from each of the 5 Local Authorities involved in the pilot scheme.

All interviewing (both quantitative and qualitative) was conducted between 17th February and 19th March 2007.

Quotas were set on both consumers and businesses to ensure representative samples were included in the research:

- ▶▶ Quotas set for consumers to ensure sample representative by social grade, working status, sex and age
- ▶▶ Although within the business sample, we purposefully under-represented major national businesses and retail establishments, and over-represented single outlets and catering establishments (i.e. the businesses most likely to be affected by the scheme).

2 Summary and Recommendations

a) Summary of findings

Consumers

Consumer awareness of the Food Hygiene Information scheme is quite low:

- ▶ 5% of consumers are able to accurately recall the scheme without prompting, rising to 14% after they were read a description of the scheme
- ▶ Only 28% of consumers think it is possible to check the food hygiene status of retail or catering outlets in their area (and many of these consumers don't know how to check)
- ▶ Only 2% are able to accurately recall any advertising or publicity about the scheme
- ▶ Once shown examples of the certificates, 18% claim to have seen them.

Although awareness is quite low, reactions to the scheme and intentions to act are very positive:

- ▶ 47% claim they are likely to check on a retail or catering outlet's food hygiene status in the future
- ▶ 79% are likely to look out for the certificates in the future
- ▶ Many claim that the certificate will have a large impact on their propensity to buy food from outlets in the future
 - ▶ 64% say they would be less likely to buy food from an outlet not displaying its certificate
 - ▶ 85% say they would be more likely to buy food from an outlet displaying a pass certificate
 - ▶ 37% say they would stop going to an outlet displaying an improvement required certificate, while a further 48% would be less likely to go (which equates to a total impact of 85%)
 - ▶ 33% say they would stop going to an outlet displaying an awaiting inspection certificate, while a further 33% would be less likely to go (which equates to a total impact of 66%)

Opinions of the scheme are very positive. The vast majority of consumers (91%) think the scheme is useful and believe it will be effective (89% think retail and catering establishments are more likely to comply as a result of the scheme). 98% think it's fair that the public are able to check a retailer's and caterer's food hygiene status.

Although not prompted, a few consumers spontaneously suggested that the scheme should be made compulsory for it to be effective.

Businesses

Business awareness and understanding of the scheme is reasonably high, although:

- ▶▶ 39% claim never to have heard of the scheme or claim they don't know enough about the scheme
- ▶▶ 51% claim not to have received a letter or leaflet (although the majority of those businesses did receive the certificate, suggesting it may be that they have forgotten about the letter/leaflets).

Of those businesses that recall receiving a certificate, 68% are currently displaying it, with 35% displaying it on their front window or door (this equates to 28% of all businesses). Offering the certificate in a frame or as a window sticker would encourage around 40% of those not currently displaying it, to do so.

Like consumers, business opinions of the scheme are positive:

- ▶▶ 89% think it's fair that the public are able to check a retailer's and caterer's food hygiene status
- ▶▶ 77% agree that the new scheme will encourage businesses to comply with hygiene legislation
- ▶▶ 68% agree that the new scheme will raise food hygiene standards even higher
- ▶▶ 62% agree that the new scheme will help the public make informed choices about retail and catering outlets in their area
- ▶▶ 86% of businesses think that the scheme will make businesses more likely to comply with food hygiene regulations

Although not prompted, many businesses (like consumers) spontaneously suggested that the scheme should be made compulsory.

Local Authorities

Local authorities are also positive about the scheme, but many experienced a few problems at set-up, specifically:

- ▶▶ A perceived lack of time to get everything ready (merging/completion of database and updating scoring system)

- ▶▶ Website set-up (One still not ready when interviewing began)
- ▶▶ Lack of awareness among consumers and businesses, meaning businesses often surprised when the certificate arrived

However, local authorities were very complimentary about Food Standards Agency Scotland with regards to offers of help/support, availability and keeping in touch.

As with a few consumers and many businesses, some local authorities think the scheme should be made compulsory.

b) Recommendations

Based on the research conducted, we would recommend that the Food Standards Agency Scotland and the local authorities continue with the roll out of the scheme.

Furthermore, Food Standards Agency Scotland should consider:

- ▶▶ Increasing consumer awareness of the scheme. Although consumer awareness is likely to grow over time via word of mouth and from seeing the certificates being displayed, there is a need to raise public awareness in the short-term through increased advertising and publicity. Increased awareness will, in turn, put pressure on businesses to comply with food hygiene regulations and to display their certificates.
- ▶▶ Providing businesses with more information, by holding seminars for businesses to explain the scheme or mailing them additional information should it be required.
- ▶▶ Ensuring all businesses are informed about the scheme, especially those classed as 'improvement required' or 'awaiting inspection', by ensuring the database is correct and that letters/leaflets are seen as important mailings (and not confused with junk mail). Possibly consider telephoning all 'improvement required' and 'awaiting inspection' businesses after issue of the letter to ensure they have received it and to offer re-inspection / inspection if all the outstanding issues have been addressed.
- ▶▶ Making the scheme compulsory. Although there is a need to ensure 'improvement required' businesses have time to act (or are at least made aware at inspection or as soon as possible after that they would be classified as an 'improvement required' if the scheme is rolled out) and that 'awaiting inspection' businesses are inspected quickly.
- ▶▶ Standardising website format for each local authority, to reduce set-up time for the local authorities and to allow businesses to easily search across different local authorities.

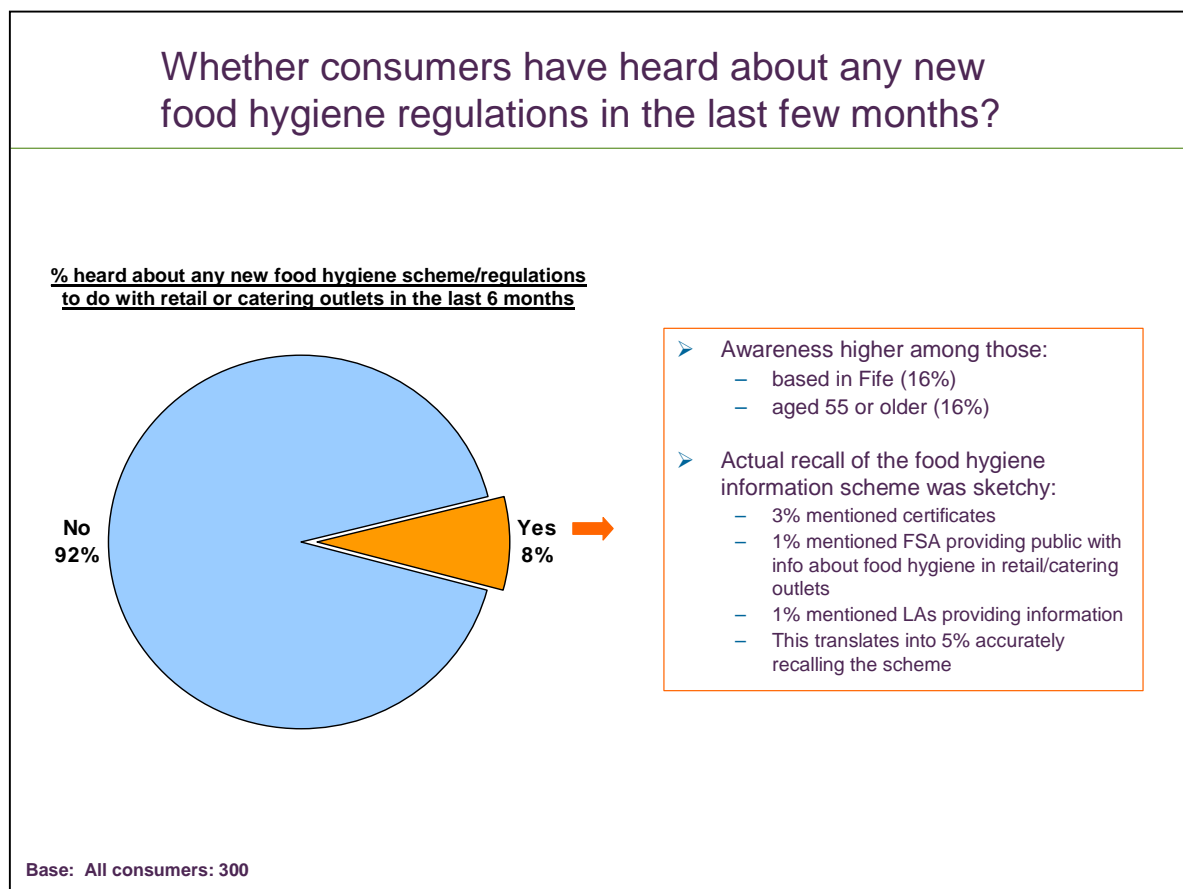
3 Consumers

a) Awareness of the scheme

Consumer awareness of the scheme was quite low. As demonstrated in chart 3.1, 8% of consumers claim to have heard of any 'new food hygiene scheme / regulation to do with retail or catering outlets in the last 6 months'. Recall was slightly higher in Fife (16% - where there had been publicity around a particular catering establishment being awarded an 'improvement required' status) and those aged 55 or older (16% - possibly as they're more likely to read local newspapers where there had been some publicity about the scheme).

However, when those 8% of consumers were actually asked what they remembered, recall was sketchy. Many couldn't remember what they had seen/heard, although 5% recalled the scheme accurately with 3% mentioning certificates, 1% mentioning Food Standards Agency providing public with information about food hygiene in retail/catering outlets and 1% mentioning local authorities providing information.

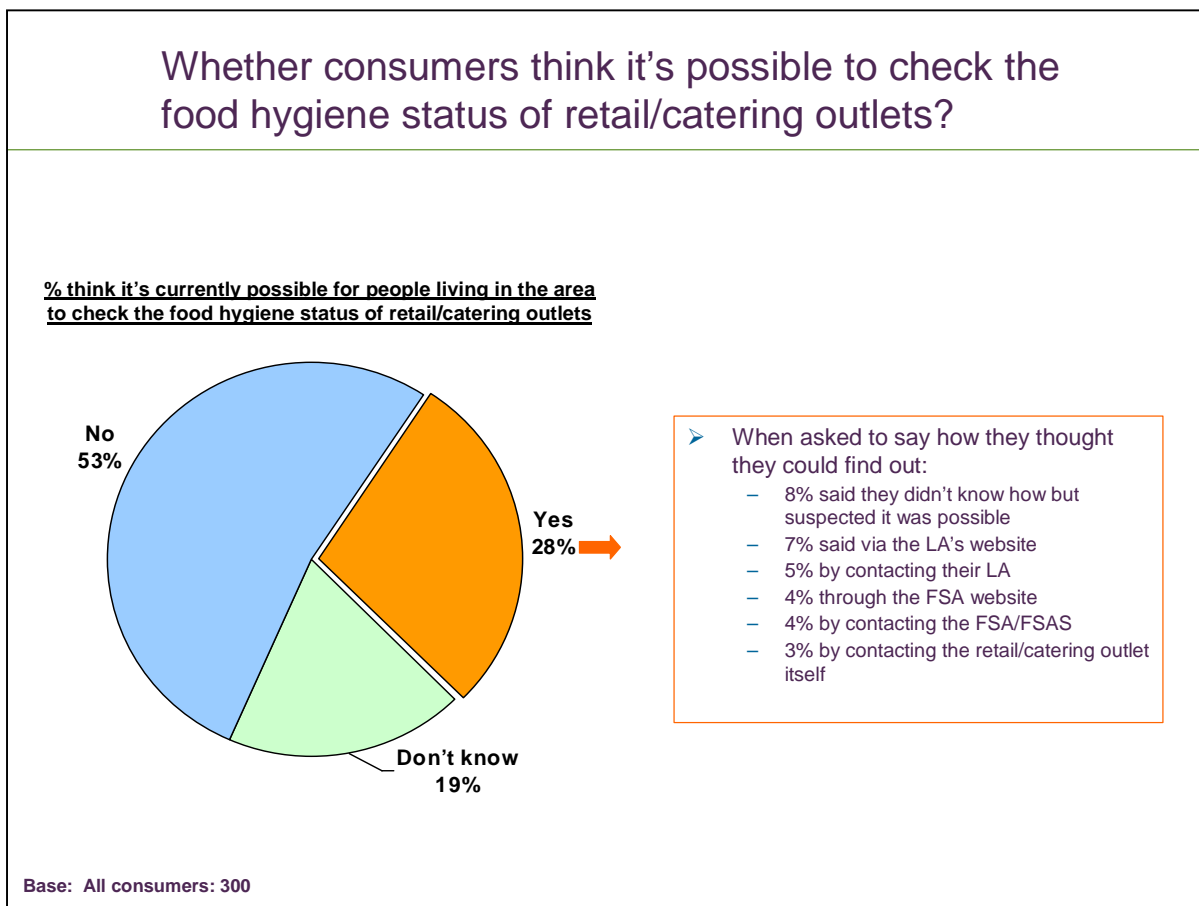
Chart 3.1 – Whether consumers have heard about any new food hygiene regulations in the last few months?



Over a quarter of consumers think it's currently possible to check the food hygiene status of retail and catering outlets, although many of those are not sure how to do it (chart 3.2).

However, quite a few spontaneously mentioned correct ways of checking the food hygiene status of a retail or catering outlet i.e. 7% said via the local authority's website.

Chart 3.2 – Whether consumers think it's possible to check the food hygiene status of retail/catering outlets?

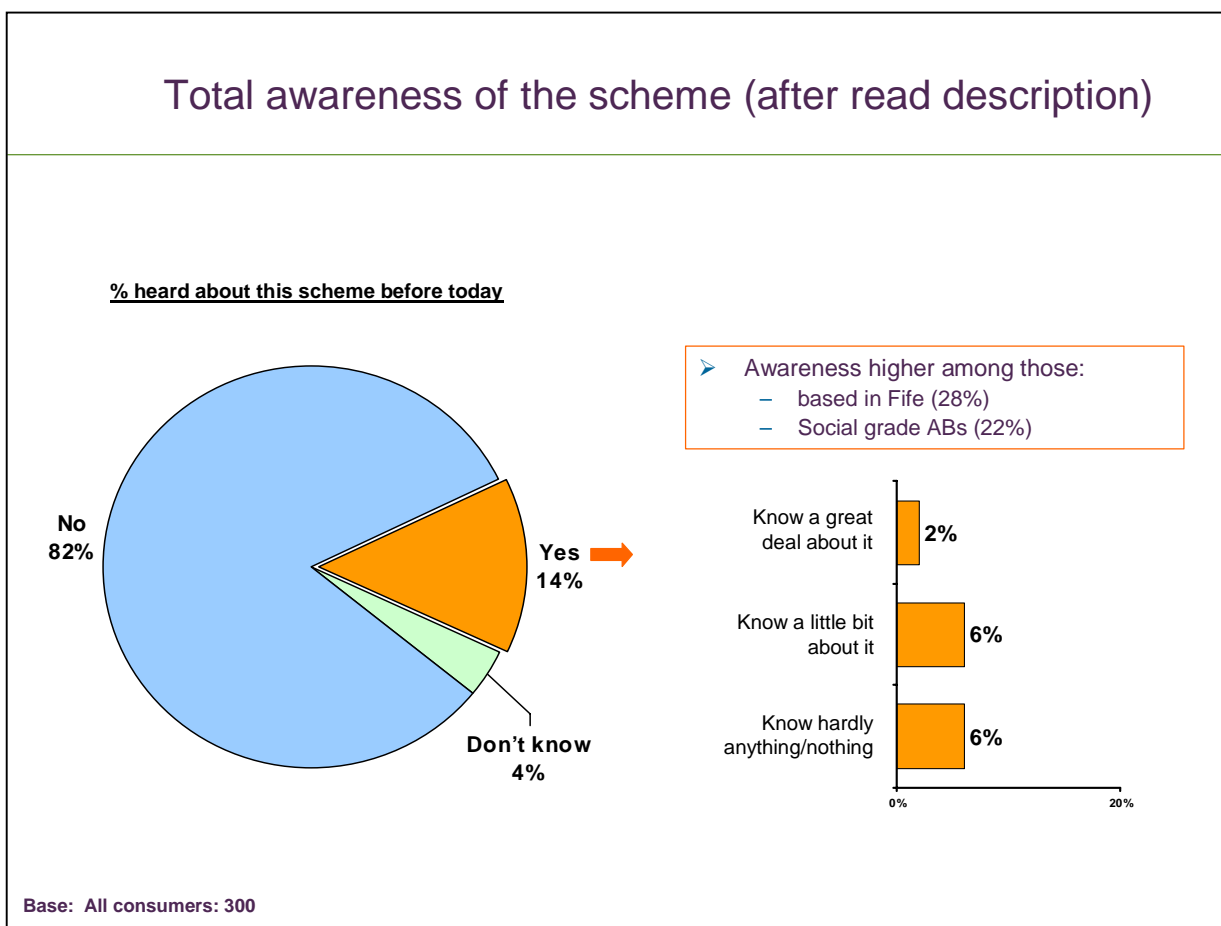


Consumers were then read a short description of the scheme and asked to say whether they had heard of the scheme before. The description was as follows:

‘The Food Standards Agency Scotland launched a scheme in partnership with ‘LOCAL AUTHORITY’ in November 2006 called the Food Hygiene Information Scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to provide the public with simplified information about retail and catering outlets with regards to food hygiene. This means some outlets might now be displaying certificates and you can check their food hygiene status on your Local Authority’s website.’

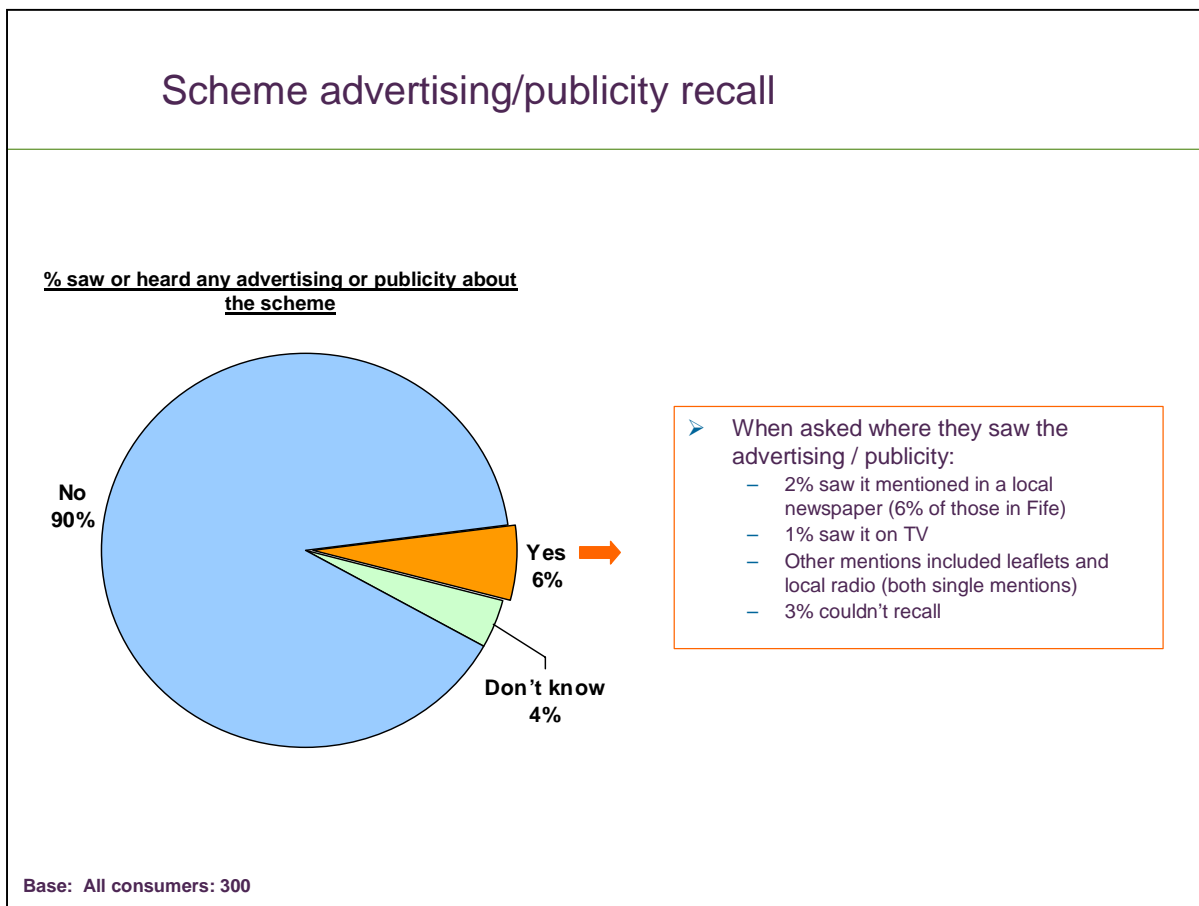
14% claim to have heard about the scheme after this prompt. Awareness was higher in Fife (28%) and among those from social grades AB (22%). Although 14% are aware, only 8% claim they know at least a little bit about the scheme (chart 3.3).

Chart 3.3 – Total awareness of the scheme (after read description)



6% of consumers claim to have seen or heard any advertising or publicity about the scheme (chart 3.4). However, only 2% accurately recalled advertising or publicity that actually took place i.e. local newspapers, leaflets or local radio. 3% couldn't recall where they had seen or heard it, while 1% mentioned TV advertisements (which didn't take place).

Chart 3.4 – Scheme advertising / publicity recall



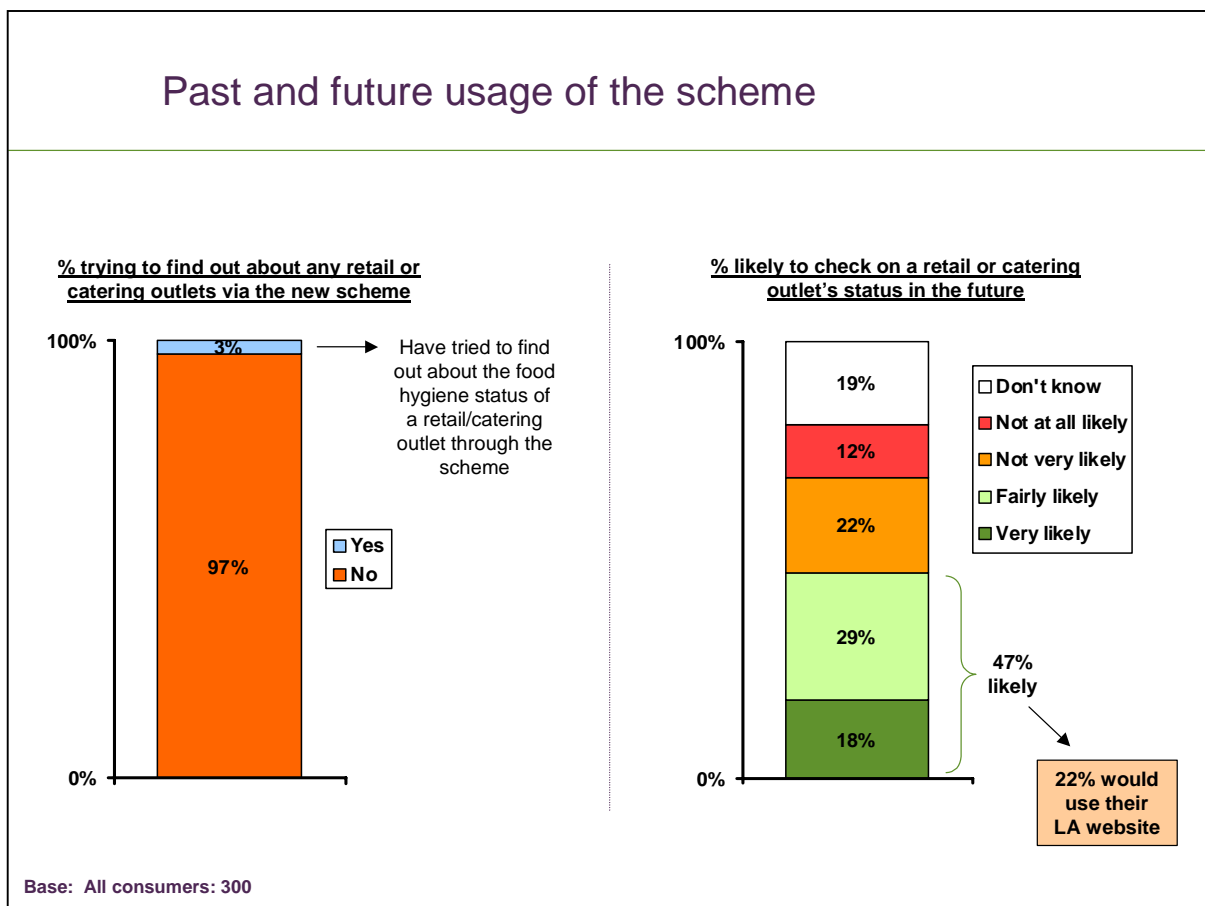
b) Usage of the scheme

Consumers were asked whether they had used the scheme in the past i.e. whether they had tried to find out the food hygiene status of any retail or catering outlets; and how likely they were to use the scheme in the future (chart 3.5).

3% claim they have “checked” on a retail or catering outlet in the past, although it’s possible this might be reactive rather than proactive i.e. they have seen a certificate, rather than been on their local authority’s website (as we discover later).

47% claim they are likely to do so in the future (18% very likely, 29% fairly likely). Just under half of that group (22%) would do so through their local authority’s website.

Chart 3.5 – Past and Future usage of the scheme

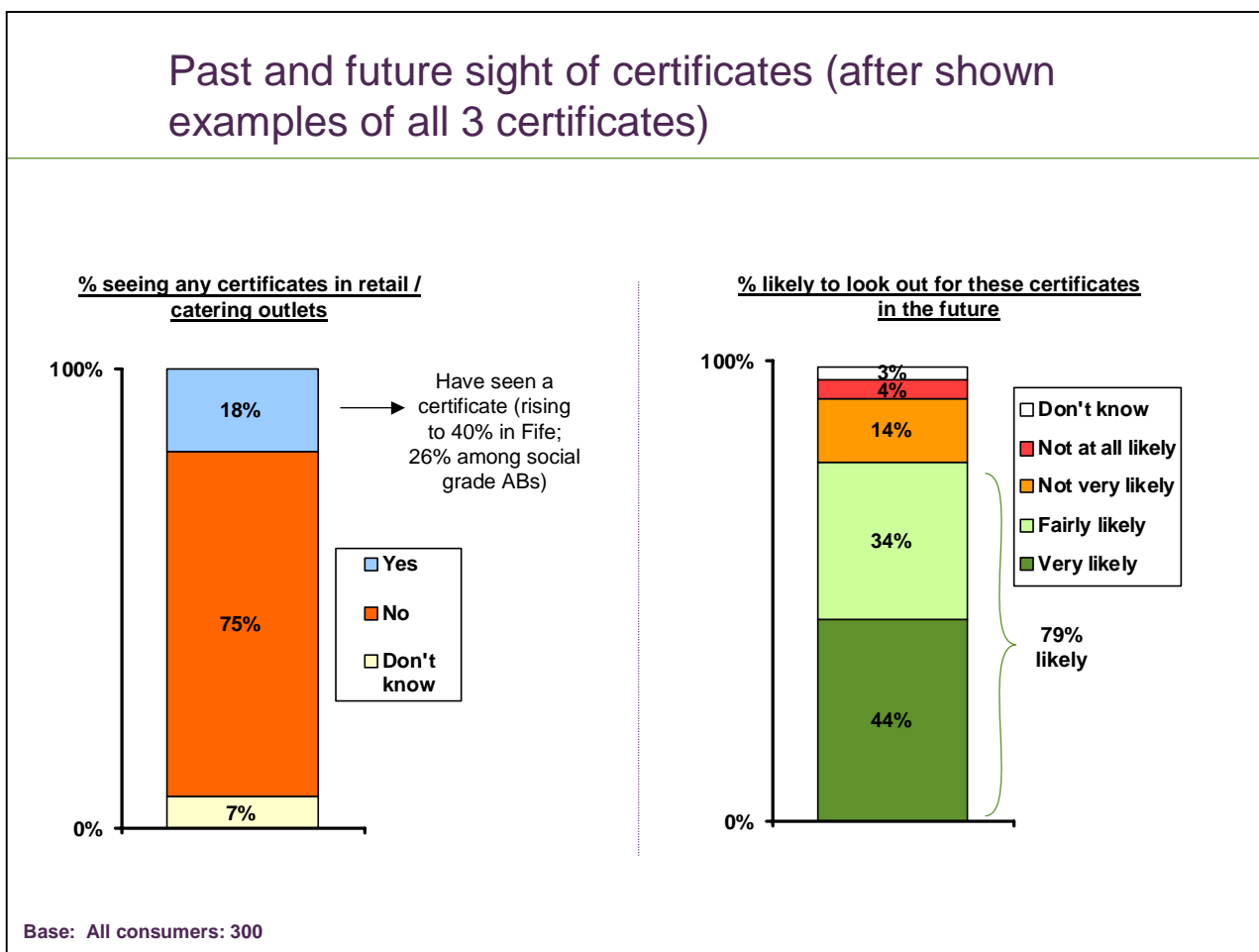


Consumers were shown A4 examples of each of the following three certificate types and asked to say whether they had seen these before in any retail or catering outlet:



18% claim to have seen these certificates, rising to 40% in Fife and 26% among those from social grade AB (chart 3.6). Almost four fifths (79%) say they are likely to look out for these certificates in the future.

Chart 3.6 – Past and future sight of certificates (after shown examples of all 3 certificates)



As awareness is quite low, it's not surprising that actual usage of the local authority websites to check the food hygiene status of retail or catering outlets is also low. 1% of consumers claim to have visited a local authority site for this purpose (this equates to 1.7% of internet users).

1% of our sample is actually just three of the consumers we interviewed (from a sample of 300) and when we look at their individual stories, we can see that there might be some confusion involved:

- ▶▶ Respondent 1: claims to have checked on a specific retail/catering outlet, although this was a consumer based in Aberdeen where the site wasn't working before or at the time of fieldwork, so this respondent may be confused (or checked the status of an outlet in another local authority, which is unlikely). This respondent claims that it was very easy to find the information needed and that it provided fairly useful information
- ▶▶ Respondent 2: claims to have browsed the Perth site and found it fairly easy to find the information and felt the information was fairly useful
- ▶▶ Respondent 3: 1 couldn't recall what happened when they visited the site (based in Renfrewshire).

c) Impact and opinion of scheme

Impact of scheme

Consumers were asked a number of questions about how they thought they'd behave as a result of the scheme and what they thought would be benefits of the scheme.

Most consumers claim that the certificate would have a large impact on their propensity to buy food from outlets in the future, evidenced by the following results:

- ▶▶ 64% say they would be less likely to buy food from an outlet **not displaying** its certificate
- ▶▶ 85% say they would be more likely to buy food from an outlet displaying a **PASS** certificate
- ▶▶ 37% say they would stop going to an outlet displaying an **IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED** certificate, while a further 48% would be less likely to go (which equates to a total impact of 85%)
- ▶▶ 33% say they would stop going to an outlet displaying an **AWAITING INSPECTION** certificate, while a further 33% would be less likely to go (which equates to a total impact of 66%)

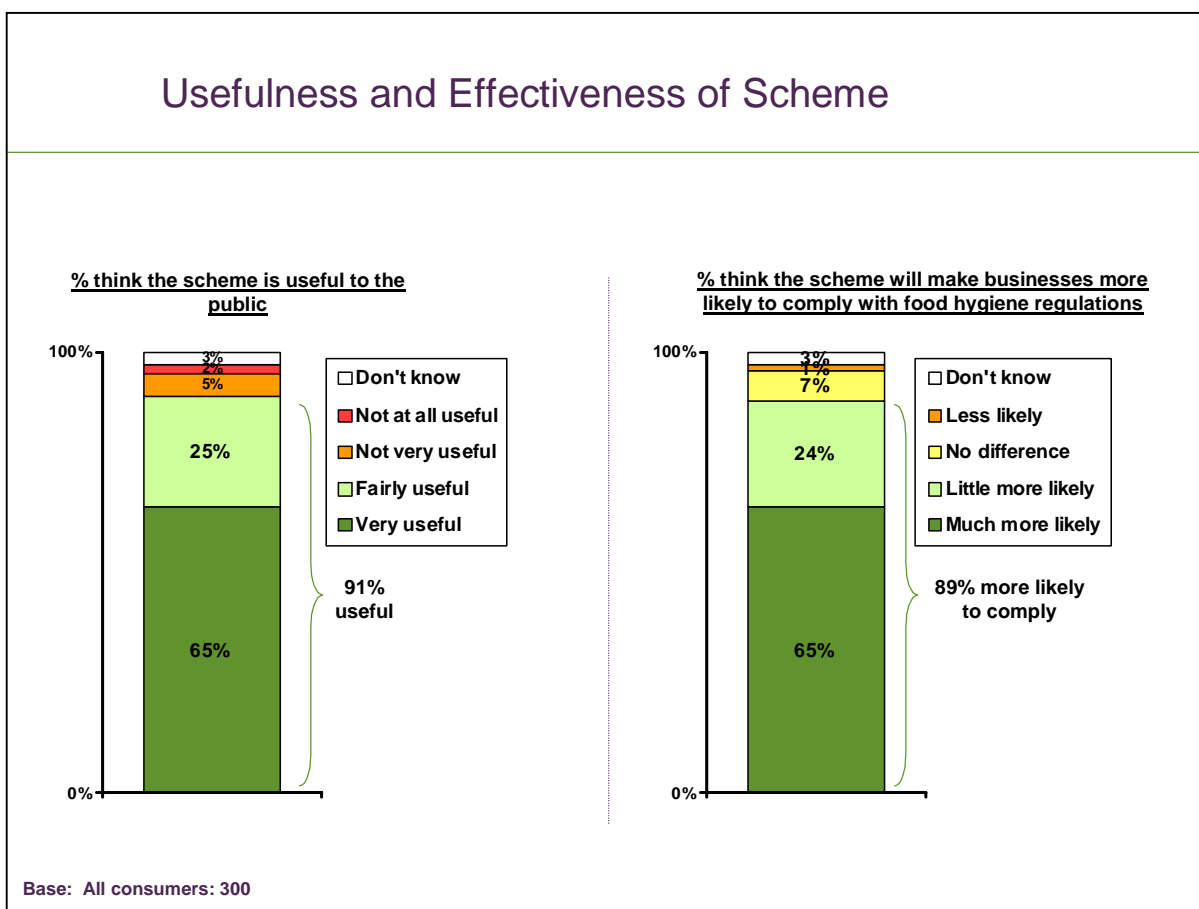
Those based in Edinburgh and women are more likely to be affected by the certificate than those from other areas and men.

Opinion of scheme

As demonstrated in chart 3.7, the vast majority of consumers (91%) think the new scheme is useful to the public. Two thirds think it will be 'very useful', while a further quarter think it will be 'fairly useful'.

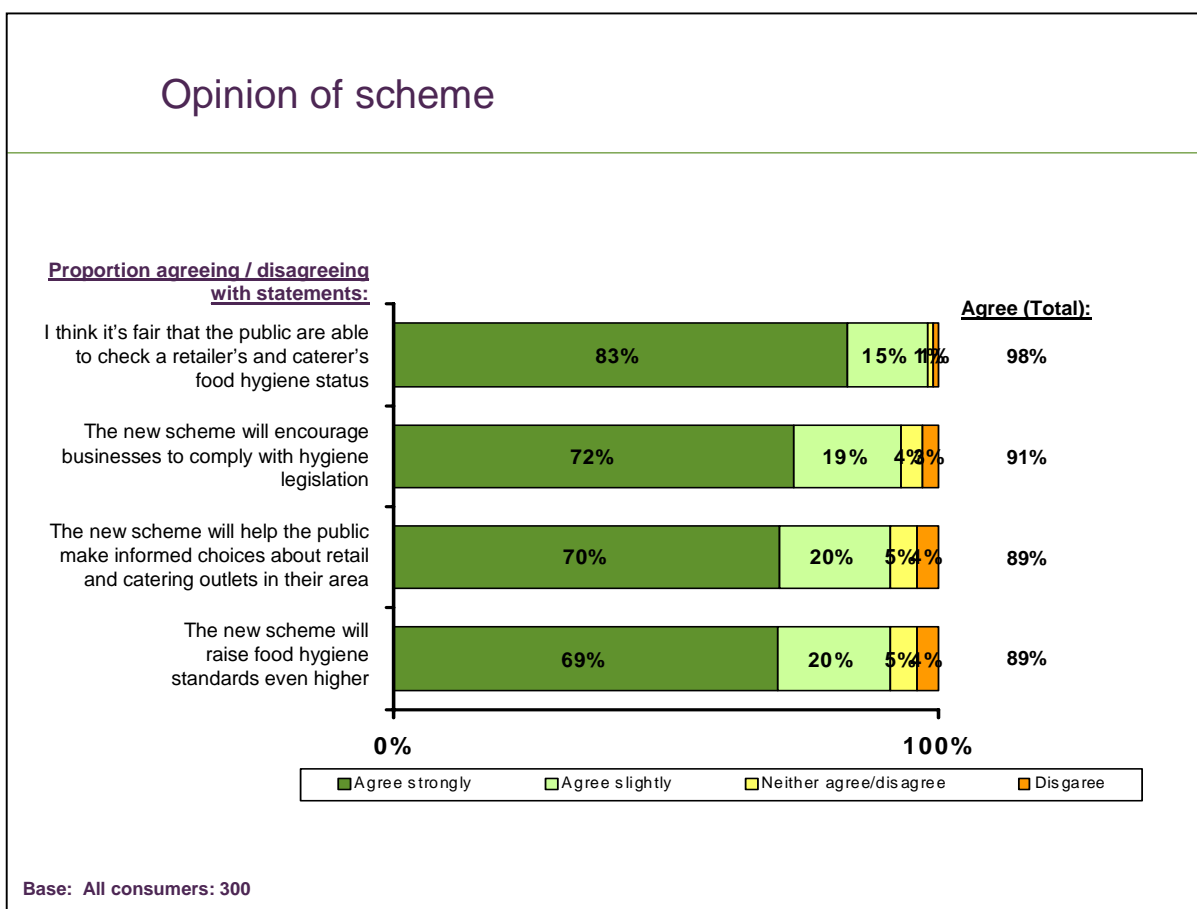
89% think the scheme will make businesses more likely to comply with food hygiene regulations.

Chart 3.7 – Usefulness and Effectiveness of Scheme



When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on a 5-point scale, it is clear that consumers feel positively about the scheme. As can be seen in chart 3.8, the vast majority agree that the scheme is fair, helpful to the public and that it will improve food hygiene standards.

Chart 3.8 – Opinion of Scheme



Consumers were asked what they generally thought of the scheme and encouraged to say what they did and didn't like about the scheme. Opinions tended to be extremely positive, although the vast majority of consumers didn't say much more than:

- ▶▶ "It's a good idea"
- ▶▶ "It informs people about hygiene"
- ▶▶ "Good for food hygiene"

However, there were quite a few consumers, at this stage of the interview, who said that the scheme should be made compulsory. Some felt it should actually be compulsory that the certificate can easily be seen from the outside.

Other mentions by a handful of consumers:

- ▶▶ The scheme should be publicised/advertised more (as awareness is low)
- ▶▶ It's just another Government standard...

4 Businesses

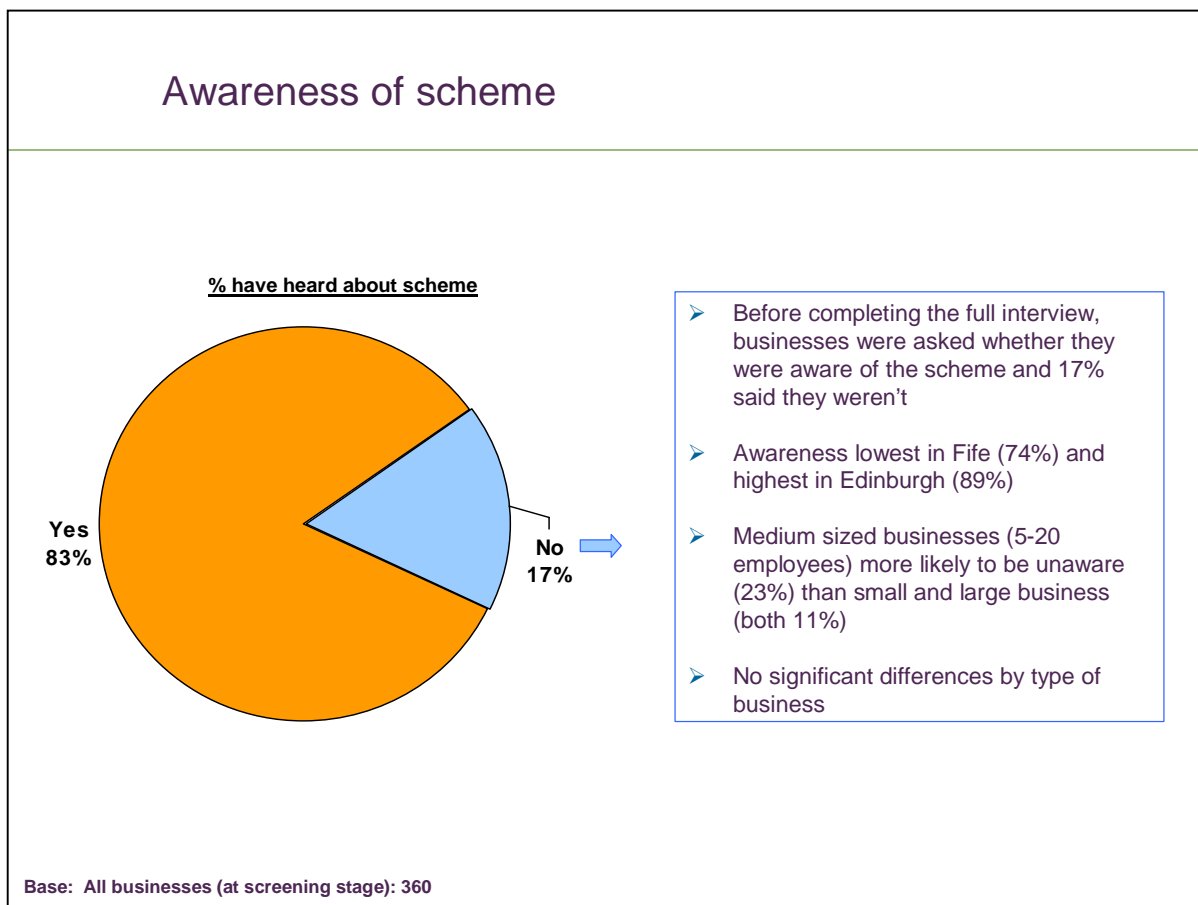
a) Awareness of the scheme

Business awareness of the scheme was obviously much higher than consumer awareness as they were (in theory) contacted directly by their local authority. As demonstrated in chart 4.1, 83% of businesses claim to have heard of the scheme (while 17% couldn't recall the scheme) when read out the following description:

“As you might be aware, The Food Standards Agency Scotland launched a pilot scheme in November 2006 called the Food Hygiene Information Scheme – you should have been issued with a certificate from your Local Authority. The purpose of the scheme is to provide the public with simplified information about retail and catering outlets with regards to food hygiene. Have you heard of this scheme?”

There were no significant differences by types of business (i.e. restaurants weren't more aware of the scheme than, say, retailers). However, there were some differences by area and by business size. Awareness is lowest in Fife (74%) and highest in Edinburgh (89%), while medium sized businesses (5-20 employees) are more likely to be unaware (23%) than small and large business (both 11%).

Chart 4.1 – Awareness of Scheme



When we talked to businesses in more detail in the follow-up in-depth interviews, it was clear that, for most, the letter and/or leaflets from their local authority or a visit from the Environmental Health Officer informing them of new scheme was how they first heard about the scheme. This then tended to be followed up by a certificate in the post.

There was a general feeling that they 'weren't told a lot' (although for some this was fine). Even after receiving the certificate, some businesses still didn't know what it meant for them. It is sometimes other factors that might prompt businesses into realising the scheme's importance (rather than the letter) such as neighbouring establishments displaying their certificates.

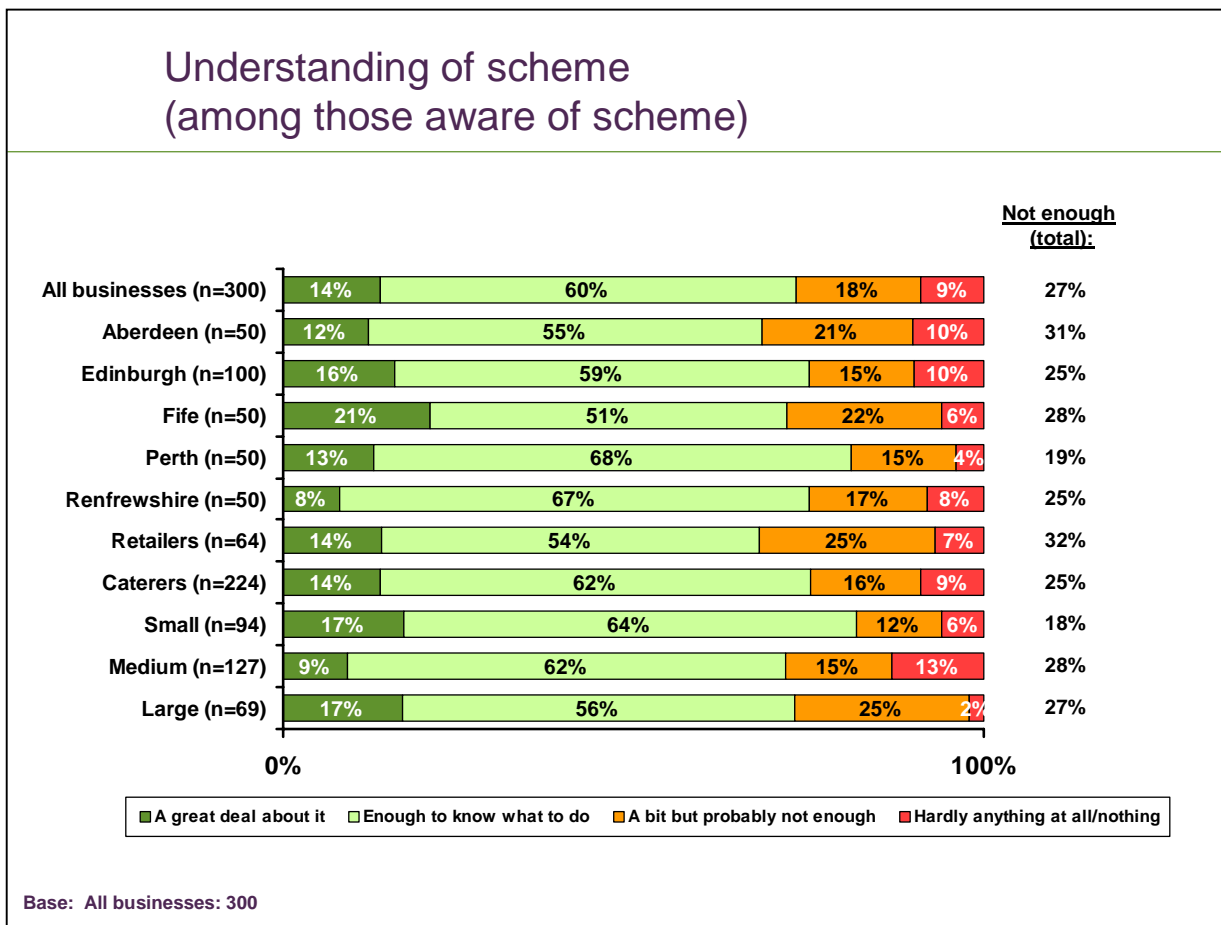
The 17% of businesses unaware of the scheme (from the quantitative survey) were then removed from the survey, and only those businesses (87% - sample of 300) were asked the remainder of the survey (as the questions specifically referred to the scheme).

Actual knowledge of the scheme (among those aware) was mixed (chart 4.2). Over a quarter (27%) think they don't know enough about the scheme (9% not knowing anything or hardly anything and 18% knowing a bit but probably not enough). When including those businesses that weren't aware of the scheme, this equates to a total of 39% either not knowing about the scheme at all or not knowing enough about it.

Understanding of the scheme was lower among:

- ▶▶ Businesses in Aberdeen
- ▶▶ Retailers
- ▶▶ Medium and large sized businesses (i.e. 6 or more employees)

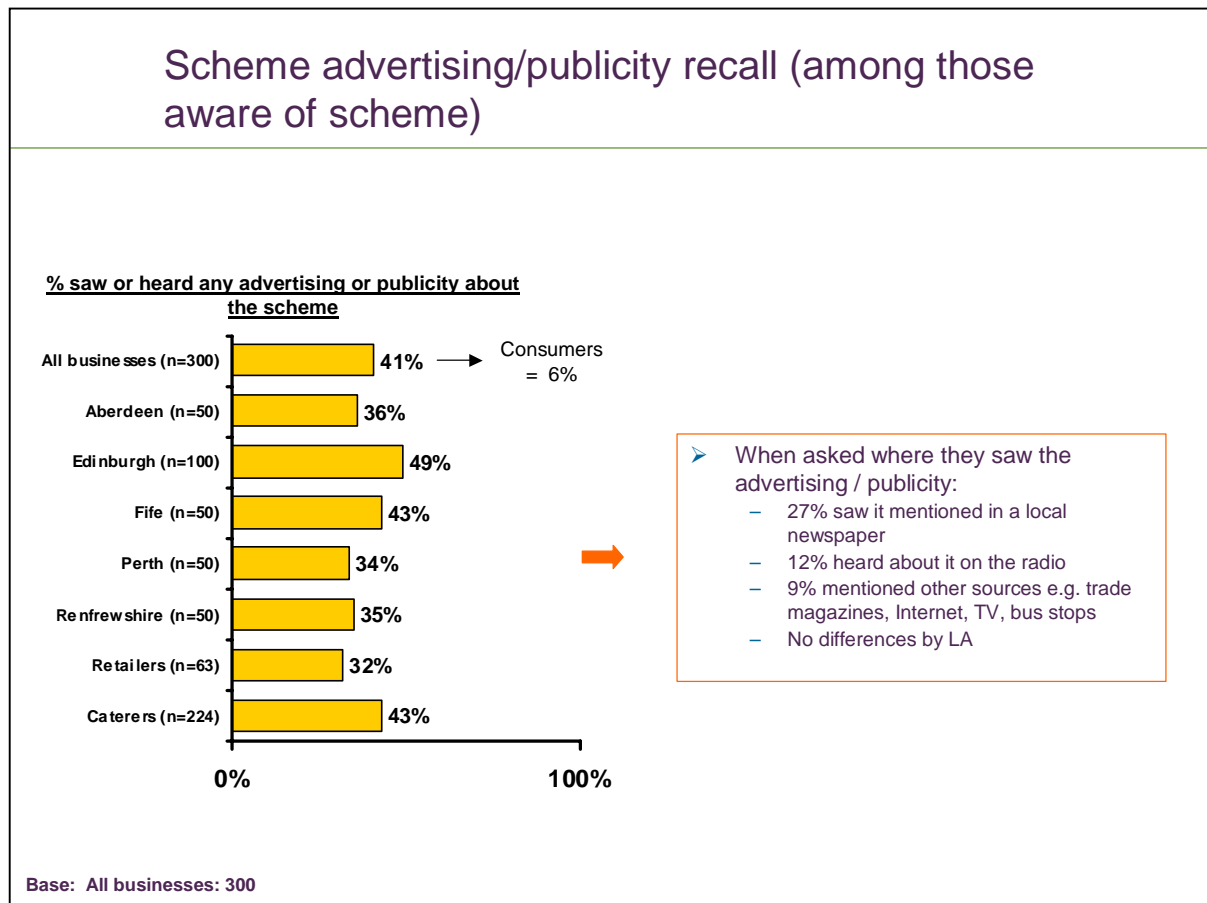
Chart 4.2 – Understanding of Scheme (among those aware of scheme)



41% of businesses (aware of the scheme) claim to have heard or seen any publicity or advertising about the scheme (chart 4.3), with 27% recalling a local newspaper article or advertisement and 12% mentioning hearing it on the radio. 9% mentioned 'other' sources such as trade magazines, Internet, TV and bus stops etc.

There were no significant differences by local authority.

Chart 4.3 – Scheme advertising/publicity recall (among those aware of scheme)



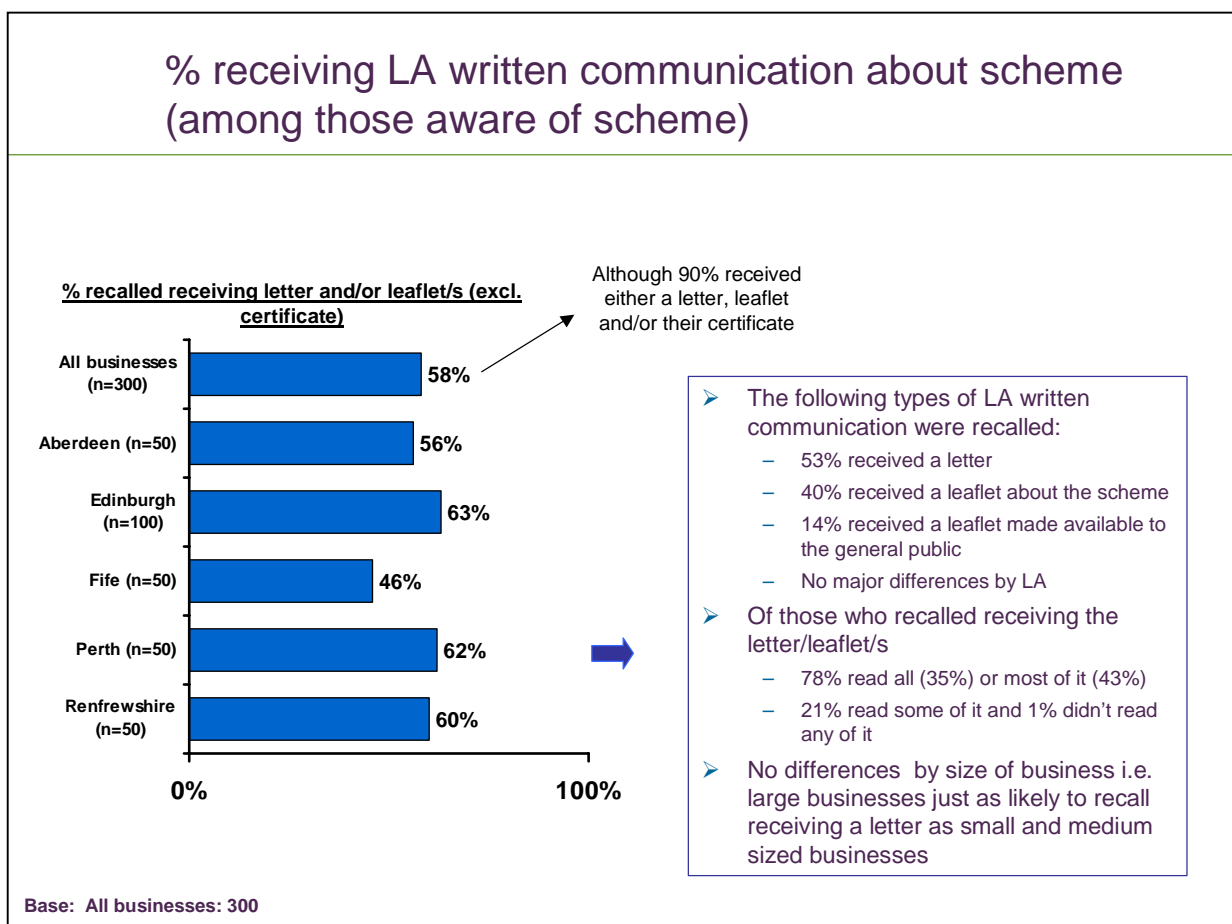
b) Local authority communication

Businesses were then asked a series of questions about the contact they had had with their local authority.

As shown in chart 4.4, 58% of businesses recall receiving a letter and/or a leaflet from their Local Authority, with 42% claiming not to have done. Recall of the letter and/or leaflet was lowest in Fife (46%). When including those people who don't recall the scheme and presumably not receiving any communication, this equates to 51% either not knowing about the scheme or not recalling receiving any letter or leaflet about the scheme. It's important to note though that when including certificates as well as letters and leaflets, 90% received at least one written communication from their local authority related to the scheme (i.e. an extra 42% claim to have received a certificate but no letter or leaflet). The fact that they received the certificate means it's likely that they forgot about the letter (as presumably the address details would have been the same).

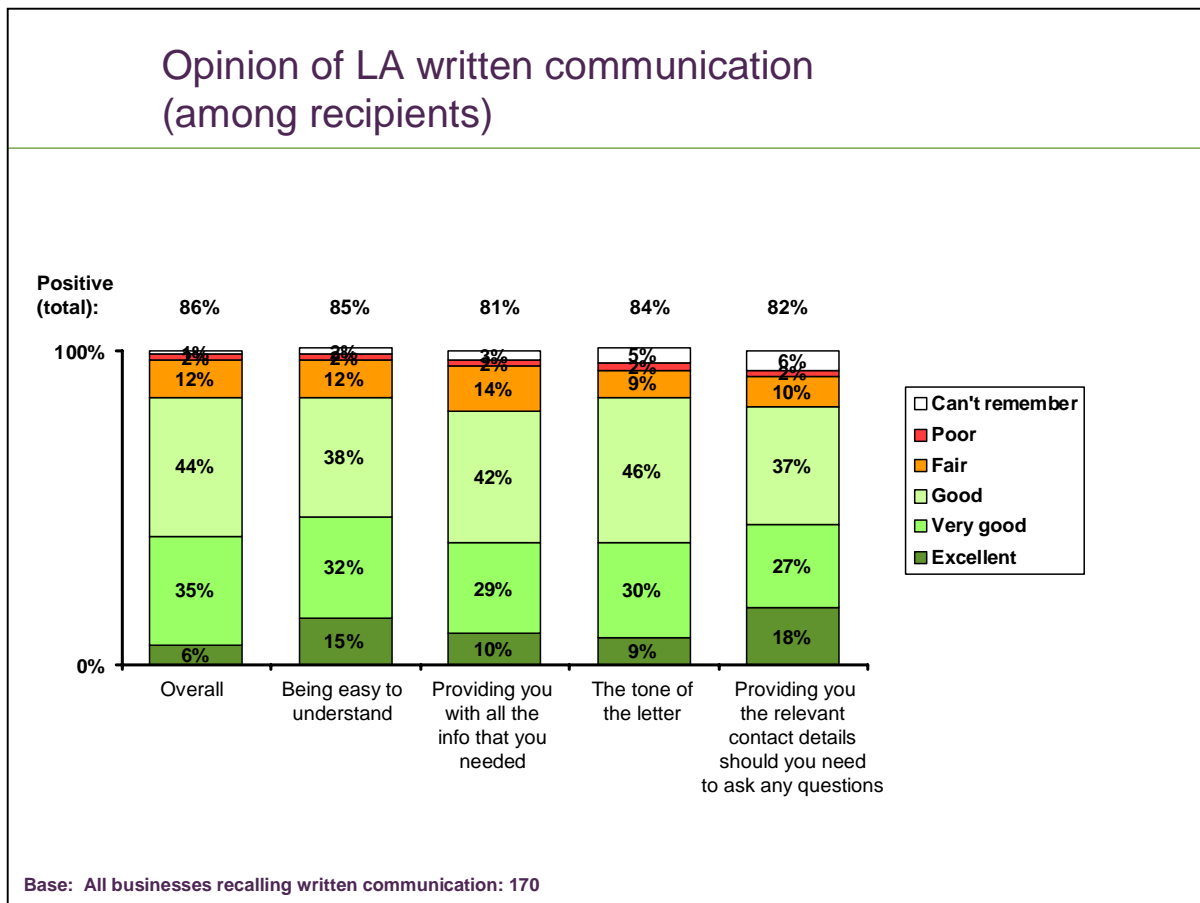
Of those that received the letter and/or leaflets, three quarters (78%) read all or most of it, while 21% read some of it. Only 1% didn't read any of it.

Chart 4.4 – % receiving Local Authority written communication about scheme (among those aware of scheme)



When asked to rate the written communication, those who recall receiving the letter/leaflets tended to be positive about them, with 80% or more rating each aspect of the written communication as good, very good or excellent (chart 4.5). There were no significant differences by local authority, retailer type or food hygiene status (although sample sizes were low).

Chart 4.5 – Opinion of Local Authority written communication (among recipients)

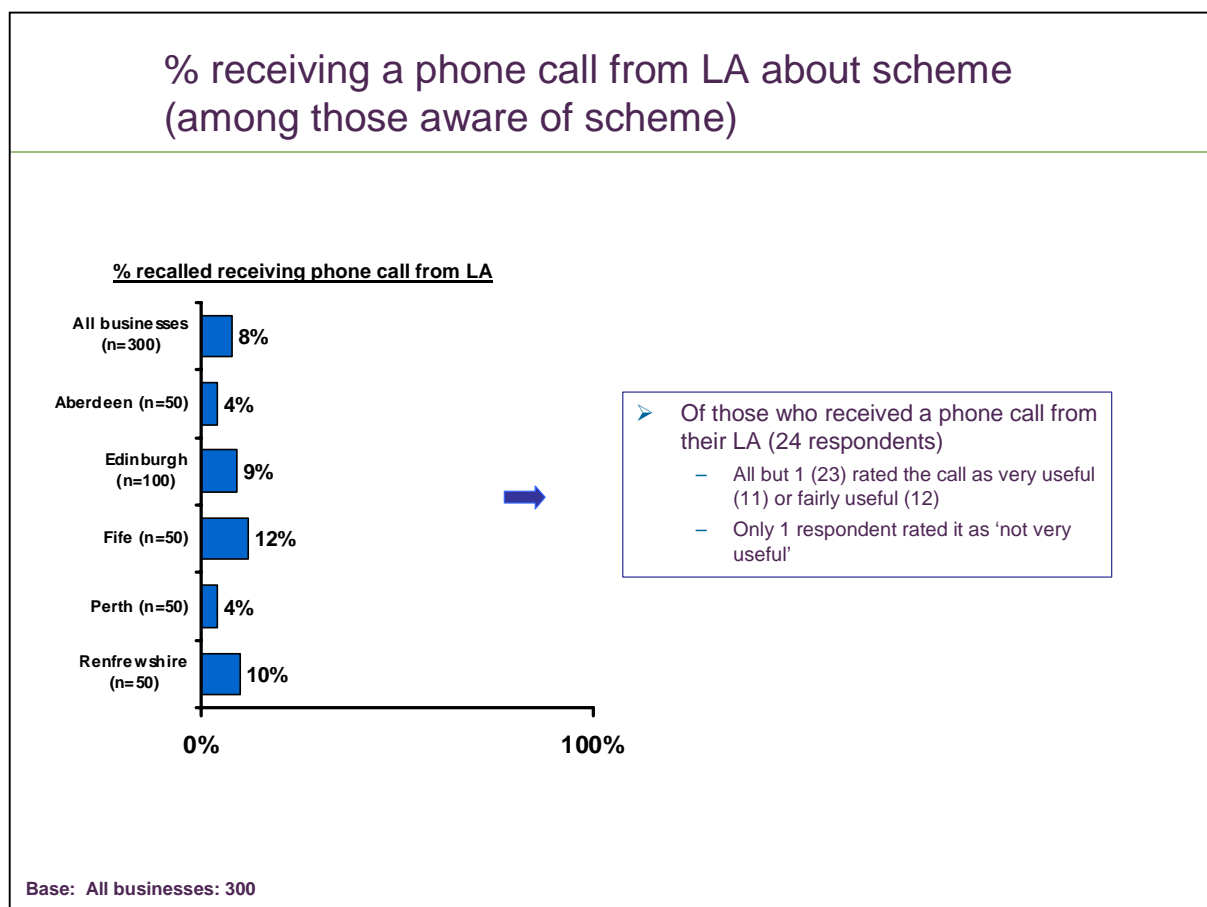


As demonstrated in chart 4.6, 8% of businesses (who were aware of the scheme – 7% of all businesses) claim that they received a phone call from their local authority as a result of the scheme.

Of those who received a phone call from their local authority (24 respondents)

- ▶▶ All but 1 (23) rated the call as very useful (11) or fairly useful (12)
- ▶▶ Only 1 respondent rated it as 'not very useful'

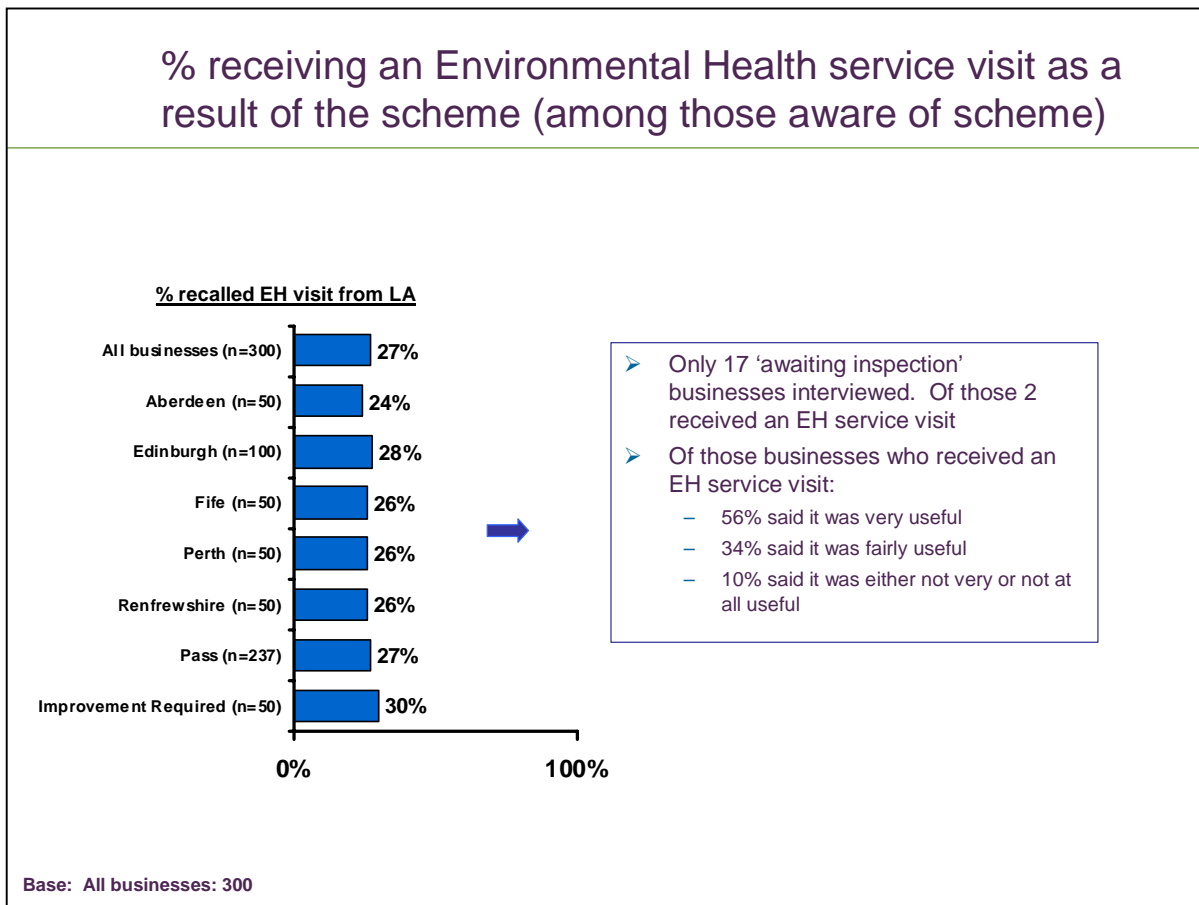
Chart 4.6 - % receiving a phone call from Local Authority about scheme (among those aware of scheme)



As demonstrated in chart 4.7, 27% claim they received an environmental health visit as a result of the scheme, with no differences by local authority and (surprisingly) by food hygiene status i.e. those who were 'improvement required' or 'awaiting inspection' were no more likely to receive an Environmental Health Officer visit than 'pass' businesses.

Of those who received an environmental health visit, 90% found it useful (possibly because their status was changed).

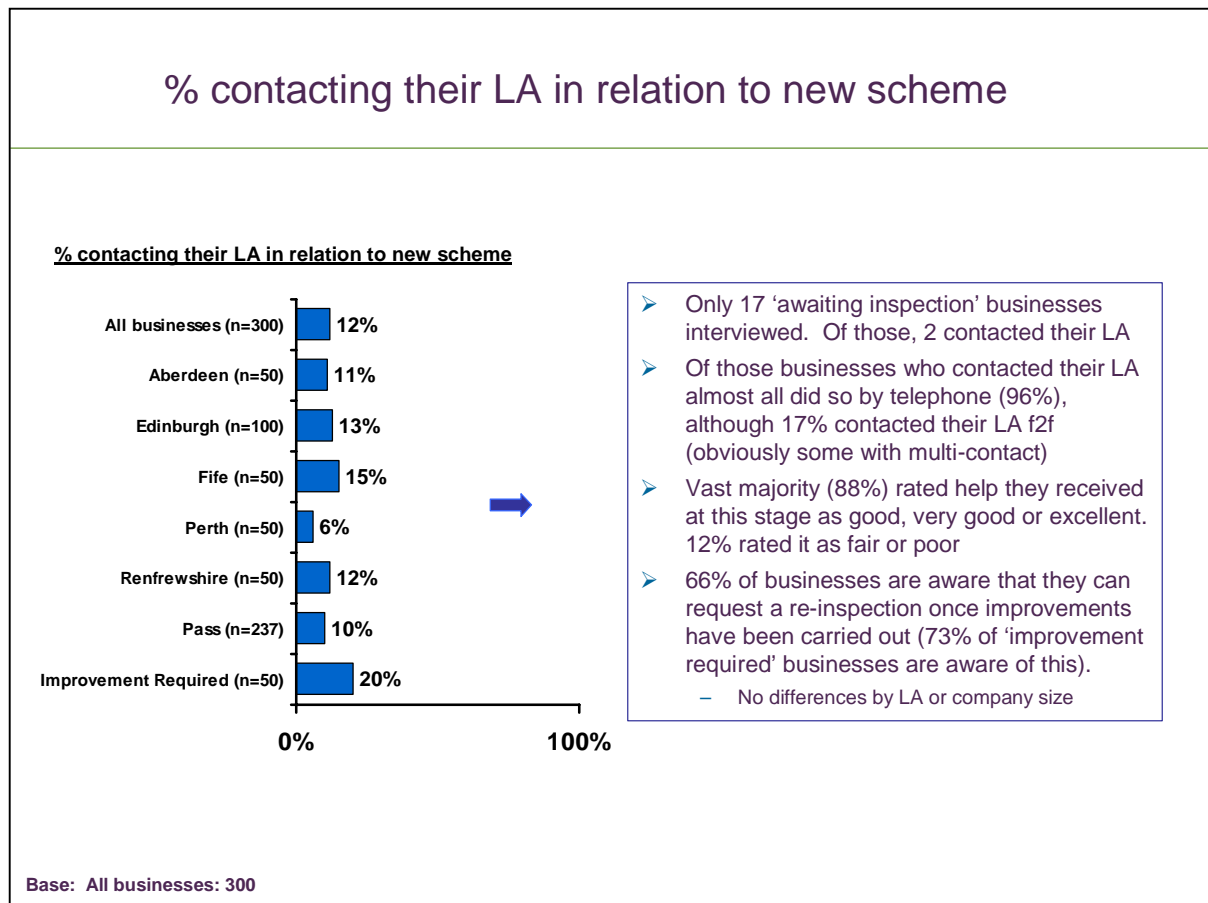
Chart 4.7 – % receiving an Environmental Health service visit as a result of the scheme (among those aware of scheme)



12% of businesses claim they contacted their local authority about the new scheme, rising to 20% among 'improvement required' businesses (chart 4.8).

Due to low sample numbers, only 17 'awaiting inspection' businesses were interviewed and, of those, 2 contacted their local authority (so no evidence to suggest that they are more likely to be in touch with their local authority than other businesses).

Chart 4.8 - % contacting their local authority in relation to the new scheme



Of those that contacted their local authority, the vast majority (88%) rated the help they received as good, very good or excellent. 12% rated it as fair or poor

66% of businesses are aware that they can request a re-inspection once improvements have been carried out (73% of 'improvement required' businesses are aware of this).

There were no differences in awareness of this issue by local authority area or by company size.

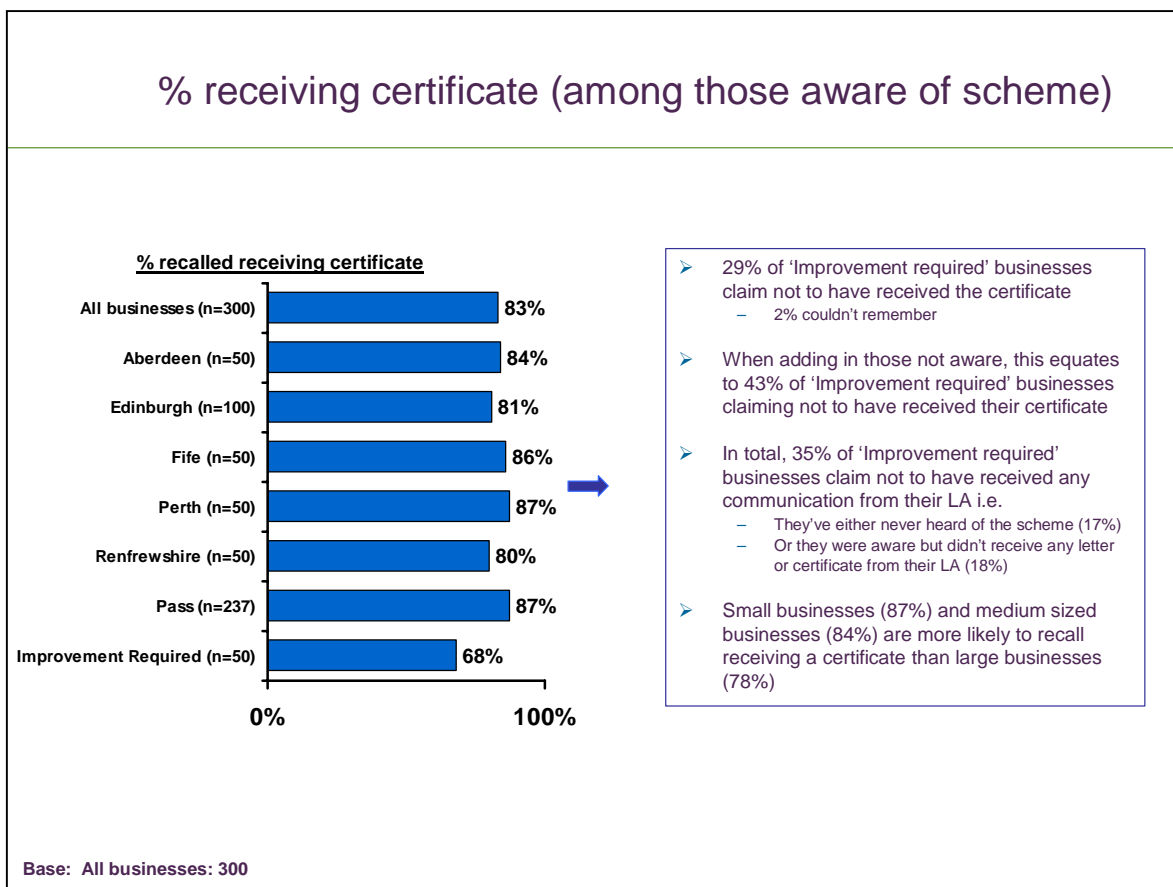
c) The certificate

83% of businesses recall receiving their certificate from their Local Authority, while 17% claim not to have received it (chart 4.9). When we include those businesses who are unaware of the scheme, we are left with a total of 30% of businesses who claim not to have received a certificate from their Local Authority.

Small businesses (87%) and medium sized businesses (84%) are more likely to recall receiving a certificate than large businesses (78%).

Interestingly, 'improvement required' businesses were less likely to recall receiving a certificate than 'pass' businesses (29% vs. 11%). When including those not aware of the scheme, this equates to 43% of 'Improvement required' businesses claiming not to have received their certificate. Indeed, 35% of 'Improvement required' businesses claim not to have received any communication from their local authority i.e. they've either never heard of the scheme (17%) or they were aware of the scheme but didn't receive any letter, leaflets or certificate from their local authority (18%).

Chart 4.9 – % receiving certificate (among those aware of scheme)



Displaying the certificate (among all businesses)

A majority of businesses (52%) are not displaying a certificate for the following reasons:

- ▶▶ 30% claim not to have received a certificate from their Local Authority
- ▶▶ 22% have received it, but are not currently displaying it anywhere

The remaining 48% are displaying their certificate, but only 28% are displaying it on their front window/door.

Displaying the certificate (among recipients of the certificate)

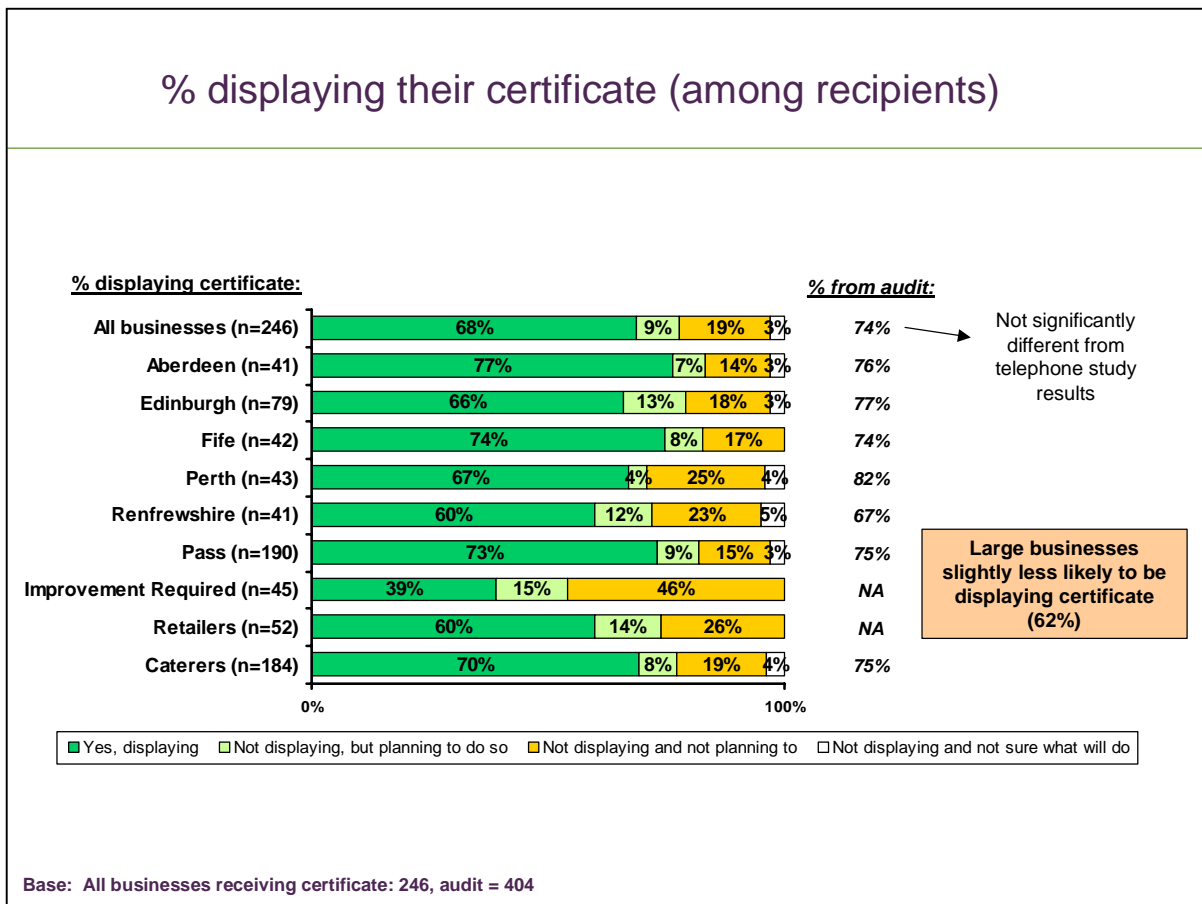
As demonstrated in chart 4.10, when excluding those people who claim not to have received the certificate, over two-thirds who have received the certificate claim they are currently displaying it (68%).

One of the main reasons for conducting the audit (as well as the telephone survey) was to establish real levels of certificate display (rather than what businesses told us over the telephone). Interestingly, there were similar results from the telephone study and the audit (and where we interviewed the same businesses on both studies we had a 100% match in terms of their answer). Our conclusion is that businesses are happy to be honest about whether or not they are displaying their certificate.

A further 9% are not currently displaying their certificate but are planning to do so in the future. 19% are not currently displaying their certificate and are not planning to do so in the future, while 3% were unsure what they would do.

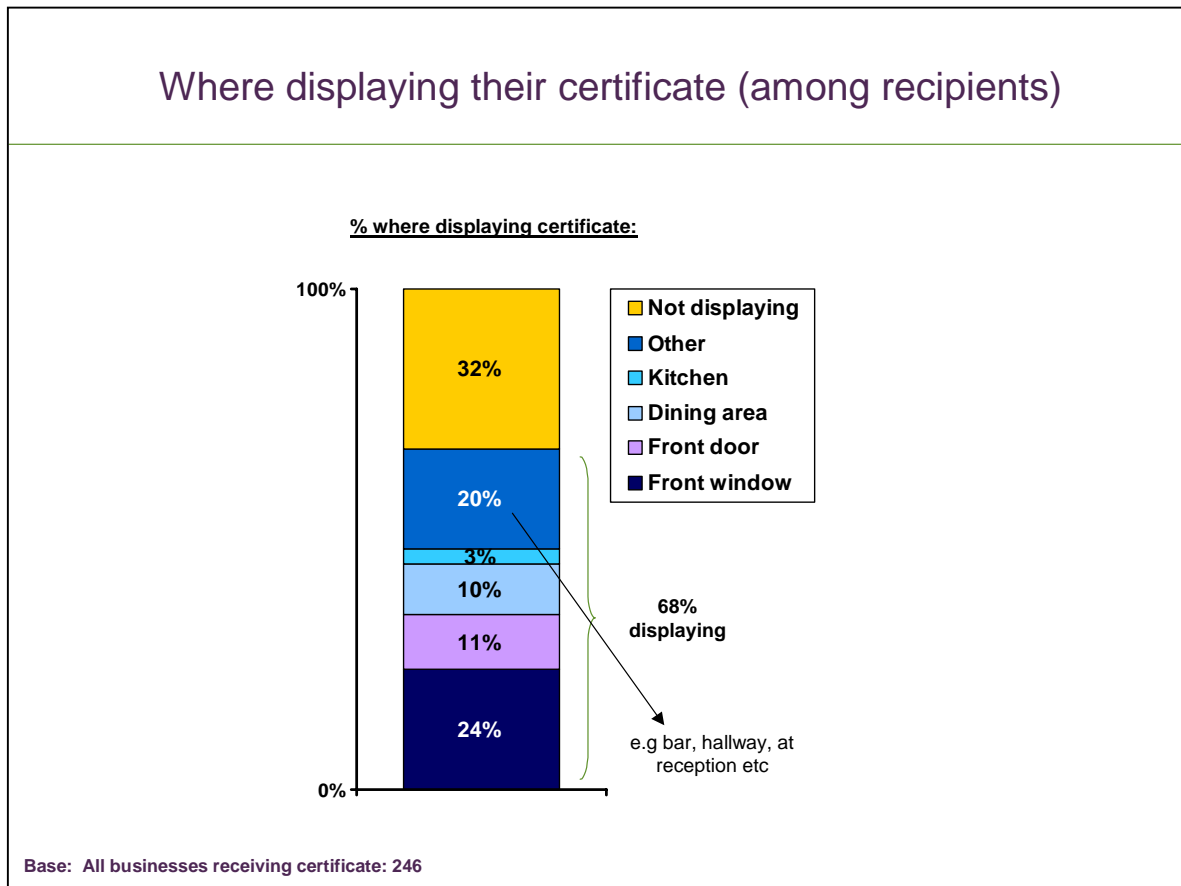
Not surprisingly, 'improvement required' businesses were much less likely to be displaying their certificate (39%) than 'pass' businesses (73%). In addition, almost a half of 'improvement required' businesses (46%) were not planning to display their certificate in the future (compared with only 15% of 'pass' businesses). Retailers (60%) and large businesses (62%) were also less likely to be displaying the certificate.

Chart 4.10 – % displaying their certificate (among recipients)



35% of those who have received the certificate are currently displaying it on their front window/door (chart 4.11). As mentioned earlier in this section, when including those unaware of the scheme and those who claim not to have received the certificate, this equates to 28% of all businesses displaying the certificate visibly to the general public i.e. so the certificate can be seen from the outside).

Chart 4.11 – % displaying their certificate (among recipients)



Businesses were then asked why they were or were not displaying their certificate. The following reasons were given for not displaying the certificate (in order of number of mentions):

- ▶▶ It's not compulsory
- ▶▶ Restaurant policy (doesn't suit the surroundings)
- ▶▶ Not a pass / doesn't reflect "real" status / not up-to-date
- ▶▶ Food is a very small element of our business
- ▶▶ Don't agree with the scheme (one mention).

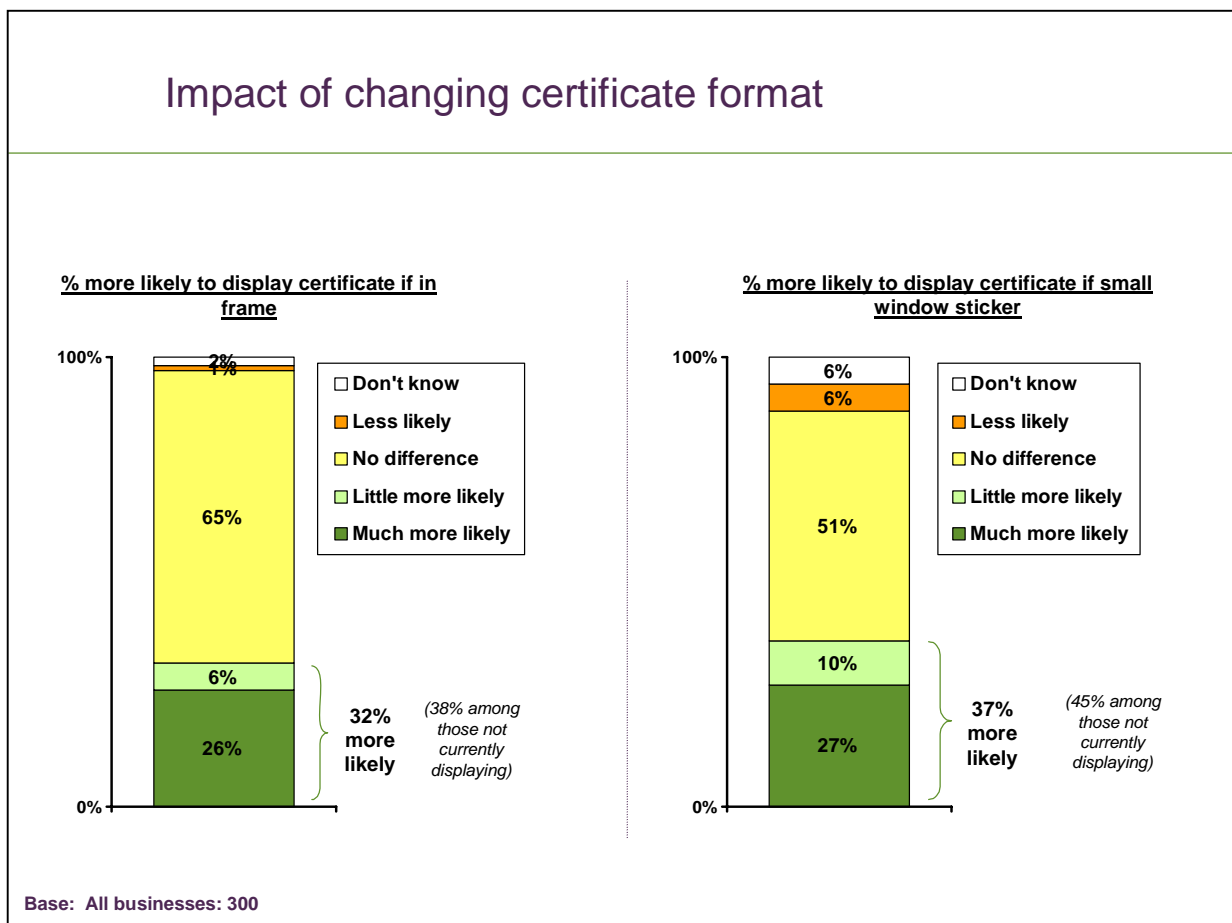
While the following reasons were given for displaying the certificate:

- ▶▶ Helps make the public aware and more confident (vast majority of responses)

- ▶ Because the local authority letter advised us to / told us to
- ▶ So staff are aware of the scheme (and to demonstrate to them why food hygiene is important)
- ▶ People might think we haven't passed if we don't display it
- ▶ Other businesses are doing it, so felt I needed to (1 respondent).

A third claim they would be more likely to display their certificate if it came in a frame. While a similar proportion would be more likely to display it if it came as a small window sticker (chart 4.11).

Chart 4.12 – Impact of changing certificate format



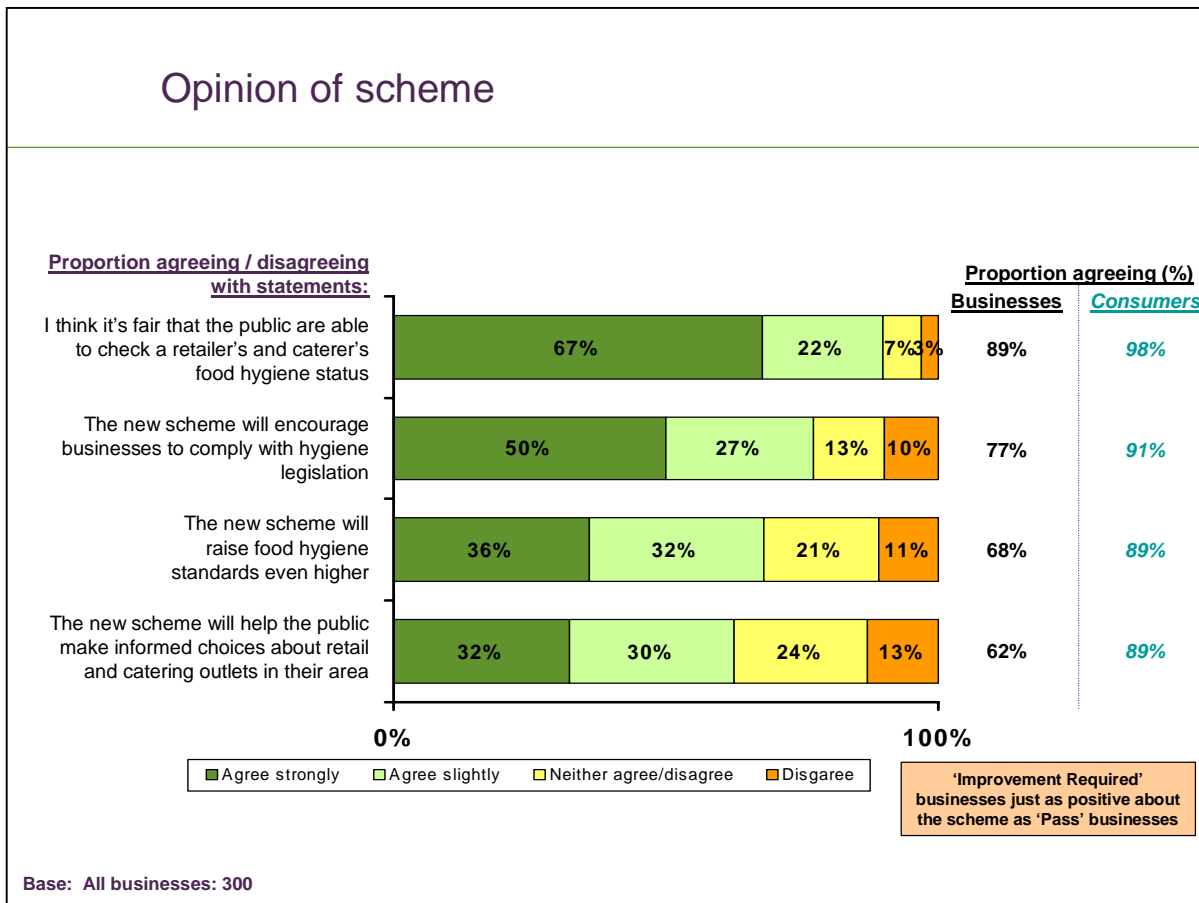
d) Impact and opinion of scheme

Like consumers, businesses were asked a number of questions about what they thought would be the impact of the scheme and what they thought would be benefits of the scheme.

Opinion of scheme

As demonstrated in chart 4.13, the majority of businesses (like consumers, although to a lesser extent) agree that the scheme is fair, helpful to the public and that it will improve food hygiene standards.

Chart 4.13 – Usefulness and Effectiveness of Scheme



Those businesses interviewed in more depth as a follow up to the quantitative stage, tended to view the scheme quite positively, although with a few quibbles.

The scheme was seen to perform several tasks:

- ▶▶ Inform and reassure the public
- ▶▶ Improve and maintain hygiene standards in individual establishments
- ▶▶ To fit in with Europe

Not surprisingly, those with a 'pass' status tend to give it higher status, although some didn't think the scheme was very differentiating. However, there was a feeling that (eventually) customers will differentiate between 'Pass' and 'Improvement Required'.

Interestingly, 'improvement required' businesses are just as positive about the scheme's intentions but they tend to be less enthusiastic about how it has been implemented i.e. they think they have been unfairly categorised! Many complained about the improvements being "nit picky" and often compare themselves with other local establishments (that are less hygienic in their eyes) and feel unfairly treated.

Overall, however, businesses see the scheme as a welcome improvement, as long as it results in raised standards of hygiene and food safety

"It will cut down on food poisoning ..."

"It'll keep you on your toes!"

It was often the process itself where businesses had comments to make (rather than the concept). Generally speaking Environmental Health Officers and local authorities were seen as helpful, and this was evidenced by the fact that:

- ▶▶ Literature is made available in different languages
- ▶▶ Communicate at inspection is very helpful because the Environmental Health Officer will say exactly what needs improving

However, given the lack of understanding of what the certificate means, it was often difficult for businesses to know what exactly they needed to do. The following questions were typical of some of the questions asked by businesses: What do I do next? How do I maintain a 'pass' level? What does 'improvement required' mean? Can they shut me down? Do I need to display it? Will customers understand it? Will they actually look for certificates? How will it affect my business? What does it mean in relation to other schemes/regulations e.g. Eat Safe, HACCP? How are they connected?

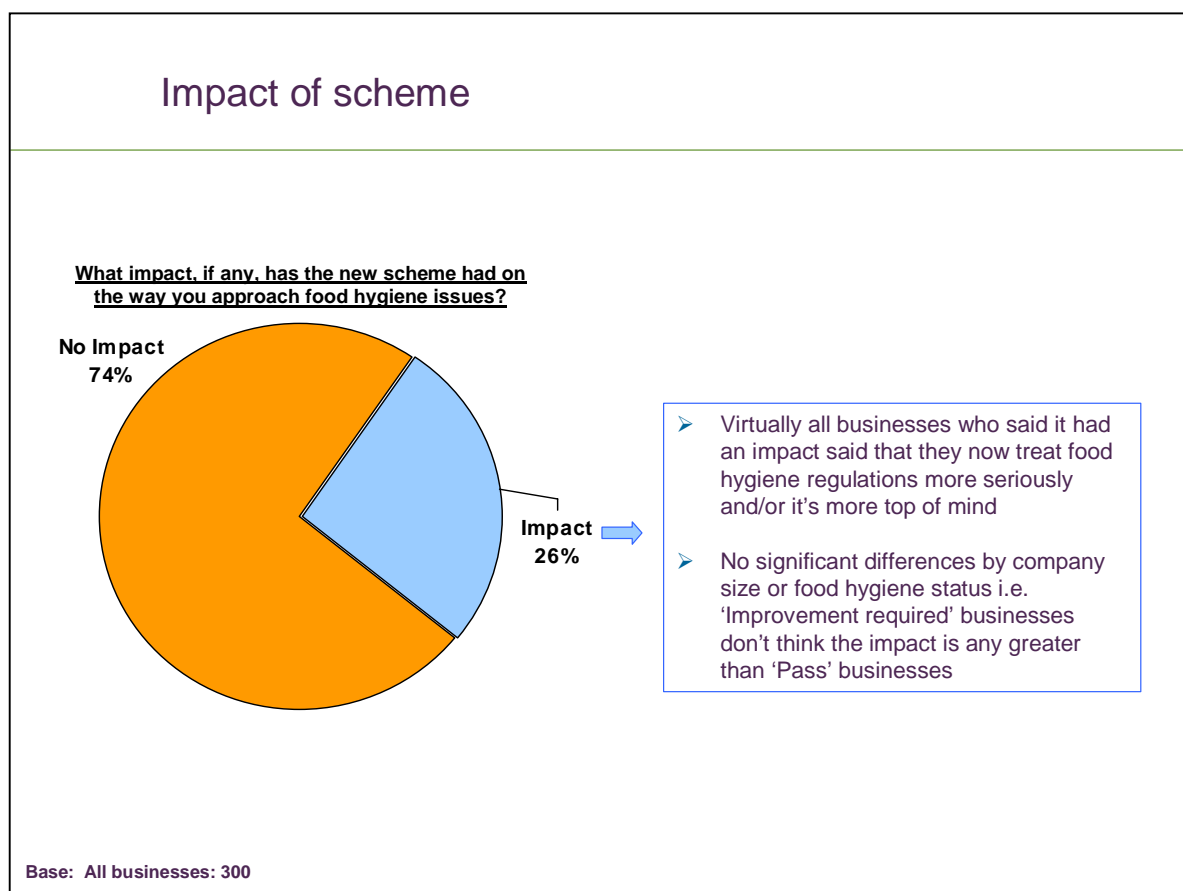
Impact of scheme

As demonstrated in chart 4.14, just over a quarter of businesses say the scheme has had an impact on the way they approach food hygiene issues.

Virtually all businesses that said it had an impact said that they now treat food hygiene regulations more seriously and/or it's more top of mind now.

There were no significant differences by company size or food hygiene status i.e. 'Improvement required' businesses don't think the impact is any greater than 'Pass' businesses.

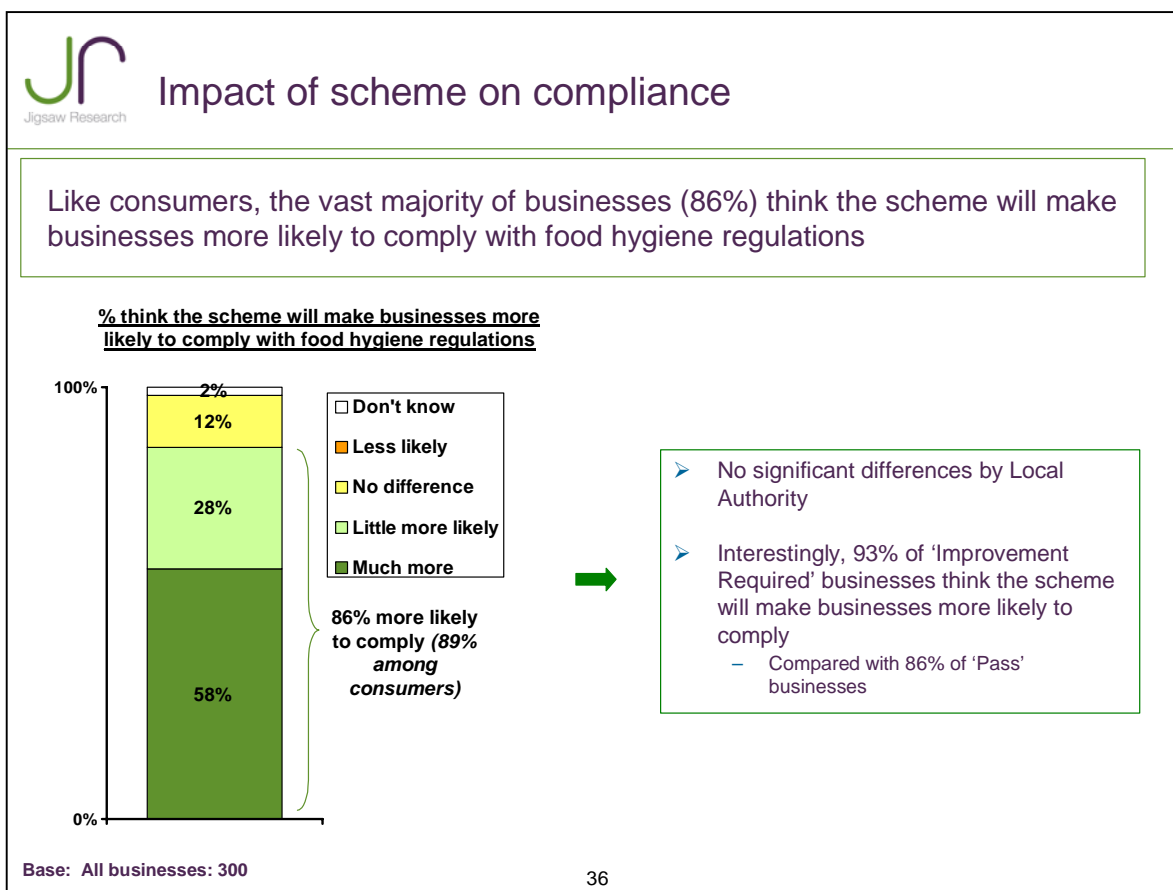
Chart 4.14 – Impact of Scheme



Like consumers, the vast majority of businesses (86%) think the scheme will make businesses more likely to comply with food hygiene regulations (chart 4.15).

Interestingly, 93% of 'improvement required' businesses think the scheme will make businesses more likely to comply, compared with 86% of 'pass' businesses. There were no significant differences by Local Authority.

Chart 4.15 – Impact of Scheme on Compliance



Businesses interviewed during the in-depth follow up stage of the research generally felt that little effort was required to get a 'pass' certificate, provided they are following all the hygiene rules:

"I am unaware of how we got our pass as I was on holiday at the time - was it a result of our usual check? - I would have liked a bit more information"

No 'inspection' was perceived to have taken place in a number of cases, and this can be a worry for some:

"I like the idea but it depends on how the Environmental Health Officer follows through. How do they control who passes? We have had no visit for two years and they sent me the pass"

Some were concerned that it was too subjective and that there were not enough Environmental Health Officers to administer the scheme/do the relevant checks.

Many agreed that it was probably too early to assess the impact of the scheme on their business, but there was a generally belief that customers (in time) will prefer 'with certificate' to 'no certificate'. Some thought it might have a positive impact on their business and on staff morale.

"Staff like it as it reflects on them, it shows that they care for their work"

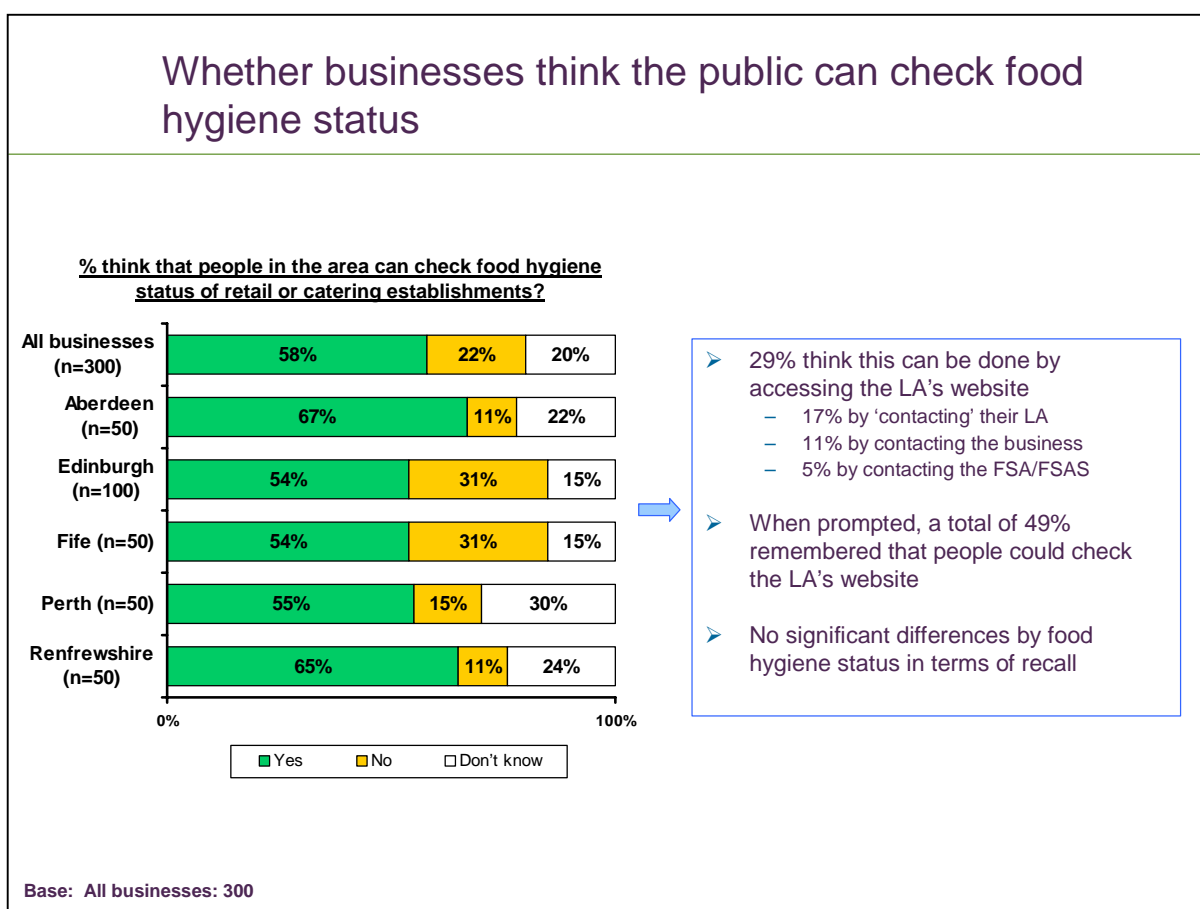
There was a major concern among 'Improvement required' businesses that consumers may exaggerate the hygiene issues (in their own minds) and that the scheme was open to 'misinterpretation'.

"The thing I like is the fact that if you have a pass rating people will see that the premises have been passed by the local authority and feel safer to go in and eat there. The thing I don't like is that I got an 'action required' certificate because I needed paint on the wall but it doesn't say that on the certificate so people will see the 'action required' certificate and think it's infested with rats and unsafe to eat here. Since then I have painted the ceiling and the lady came back and said ok but I now feel that I should receive a pass certificate."

As shown in chart 4.16, when asked whether they thought the public could check the food hygiene status of retail or catering establishments, there were many respondents who thought not or didn't know. 58% of businesses think that people living in the area can check the food hygiene status of retail or catering establishments, while 42% either thought not (22%) or didn't know (20%).

29% knew (without prompting from the interviewer) that this could be done via the local authority's website. When prompted, just under a half (49%) were 'aware' that the public could check the food hygiene status of retail or catering establishments in the area via their local authority's website.

Chart 4.16 – Whether businesses think the public can check the food hygiene status of outlets



e) Usage of local authority website

8% claim that they have been on their local authority's website to check the food hygiene status of other retail or catering establishments, rising to 15% in Fife. However (as with consumers), there were instances of businesses claiming to use a local authority website which was not up and running e.g. three businesses in Aberdeen claiming to have been on the website (the Aberdeen site was not ready before or during the interview fieldwork period).

Small businesses are less likely (3%) than medium sized and large businesses to have been on their local authority's website to check the food hygiene status of other retail or catering establishments.

Most who have accessed their local authority's website are doing so for the following reasons:

- ▶▶ To check the status of other businesses (6%)
- ▶▶ Curiosity reasons / general browse / see what the website looked like
- ▶▶ To check they've been listed properly

Only one business has checked the websites of other local authorities as well as its own (a chain outlet with the respondent based in the Edinburgh store).

Of the 25 businesses accessing their local authority's website, most (21) said it was either very or fairly easy to find the information they needed. 4 said it was 'not very easy' (3 of these businesses were based in Edinburgh). 23 of the 25 businesses said the information contained on the site was 'useful'.

There were mixed views when it came to intended future visits to their local authority's website to check the food hygiene status of other businesses. A half claim they are very likely (23%) or fairly likely (26%) to do so, while a half are either not very likely (20%) or not at all likely (30%) to do so.

f) Suggested improvements by the businesses

Businesses were asked to say what improvements they would like to see the scheme and the implementation of the scheme. The following suggestions were made:

- ▶▶ More information generally for businesses, and information that is easy to understand.

“A letter or some sort of information rather than just sending me my certificate and nothing else”

“It was good because we got a pass, but at the same time a lot of businesses have failed on things that happened 2 or 3 years ago, even though it has now been sorted out. I also didn't realise that you could fail if the window has too much glare on it!”

“When giving out information make it simple, straightforward and easy to understand”

“Basic information on what is expected of us to fall in line with the scheme and advice on achieving that”

- ▶▶ Raise awareness of the scheme among the public

“They should raise more public awareness of what the certificate is about “

- ▶▶ Consistency and clarity of scoring/award levels

“Don't be so pedantic with regard to their (Environmental Health Officer) requirements, and give out information in simple and easy to understand language”

- ▶▶ Face to face or telephone contact to explain the scheme, and perhaps help businesses interpret what needs to be done to achieve a 'pass'

“Some of it is too generic...”

“I would have liked to see an open debate, lots of people have lots of questions“

- ▶▶ Make the scheme compulsory, regardless of certificate level to give it some credibility/weight

“It will not work because people will not display the signs unless they have a pass”

Businesses were also asked, specifically, what additional support they would have liked from their Local Authority in relation to the new scheme. Some of these suggestions were similar to the general suggestions given above.

Not surprisingly, those who claim they didn't receive any (or all) written communication from their Local Authority would like a letter and/or leaflet explaining the scheme and a copy of their certificate.

Of those who did receive written communication, most couldn't think of any additional information and were satisfied with what they had received (with many viewing the scheme as simple).

There were a number of general requests for "more information". However, there were also some specific requests for additional information, including:

- ▶▶ Face-to-face visit explaining the scheme (about 5% mentioned this)
- ▶▶ A seminar about the scheme (one mention)
- ▶▶ Explanation behind status i.e. how do you get a 'pass', 'improvement required' (and how frequently it will be checked)
- ▶▶ Background information on why the scheme was launched in the first place
- ▶▶ Publicise it more locally so that the public are aware.

5 Local Authorities

As mentioned in the 'background and methodology' section, one key contact from each of the five local authorities was interviewed to get their perspective on the scheme and where they felt things had worked well and where things had not worked so well.

a) Set-up

Food Standards Agency Scotland asked for volunteer authorities to take part in the pilot, and those directly involved with aspects of food safety and hygiene were nominated or volunteered themselves. There was quite high awareness of the scheme before launch because some appeared to have regular involvement with the Food Standards Agency / Food Standards Agency Scotland and/or relevant committees and would hear about the scheme directly from these sources:

"It all came from a report by the Scottish Consumer Council"

First impressions of the scheme were positive. It was seen to fit with existing projects and helped fill gaps in current methodologies:

"It was something we'd talked about before ... but no national approach had existed"

The actual implementation of the scheme tended to follow the following steps:

1. Pilot scheme set up: areas/businesses selected
2. Regional meeting with local authorities
3. Plans and timescale drawn up and agreed
4. 'Scoring' system agreed – pass/improvement required/awaiting inspection criteria agreed across areas
5. Database cleansed and updated with new 'scoring' system (often more labour intensive than envisaged)
6. Written communication sent out to all businesses included in pilot. Initial letter (and leaflets) to advise on the scheme (and inform business of status) and then followed up with the certificate a few days later
7. Press/radio information bulletins (including photo shoots, local newspapers, local libraries, businesses, tourist locations, etc)
8. Website set up.

The actual set-up and implementation of the scheme was often more difficult than envisaged. Some saw it as complex and time-consuming, particularly when databases had to be merged/completed (with some experiencing issues with converging different operating systems and/or converting their old food hygiene status system to the new system).

Some felt it all had to be done in too short a time-scale and were concerned about consistency. In general, local authorities only had two months, and felt that an extra two weeks would have been useful, while an extra month would have been ideal.

Food Standards Agency Scotland was praised and their input acknowledged, particularly for:

- ▶▶ Their offers of help/support (which some took up, while others didn't)
- ▶▶ The regular meetings to ensure the pilot would be set up successfully
- ▶▶ Their availability and willingness to help – either on site or by phone
- ▶▶ Being approachable

In addition, the Food Standards Agency Scotland website was generally praised because it contained lots of relevant information and that information was easy to find.

One concern was that the scheme was quite low profile before and at launch, evidenced by the fact that there was little or no interest shown by businesses until the certificates were issued and that there was also very little awareness among the general public. The campaigns were felt not to have lasted long enough or been intensive enough. Some admitted they hadn't seen or heard anything about the scheme themselves.

b) Reaction from businesses

The local authorities were surprised by the initial lack of interest or contact from businesses. There was very little contact after the initial letter, although the reaction was usually stronger once the certificates were issued, but still quiet in some regions (i.e. recipients ignored/forgot about the initial letter and only acknowledged importance of the scheme when the certificate was issued).

Most issues revolved around 'improvement required' businesses who were less happy generally. They tended to contact the local authority to query why they have been classed as 'improvement required', but often their fears and concerns were lessened when the scheme was explained, why they were at the status they were and that a re-inspection was possible if all issues had been addressed.

After the initial 'shock' of the certificates, the considered reaction among businesses was more positive. The local authorities felt that businesses were more accepting of the scheme and could see the benefits it brings. Some businesses see the certificate as a 'badge of approval' and want to show it in a prominent position. There were even some instances of businesses not in the pilot calling the local authority to be included!

But some businesses were slightly confused, evidenced by:

- ▶▶ Some outside the pilot areas calling up to ask if need to be in the scheme
- ▶▶ Some businesses not realising the significance of the scheme e.g. putting the certificate in files with other Health & Safety documentation and not displaying it.

c) The certificate

Most local authorities think the display of the certificate should be compulsory

"The Freedom Of Information Act is here so it's not like the information is secret"

It was felt making it compulsory would give the scheme gravitas and credibility and will encourage businesses to improve their standards.

"Some see it as a status symbol and they won't want to lose it"

However, there was a concern that by making it compulsory, it could be seen as an award, akin to Eat Safe (the Food Standards Agency's Award scheme which was set up to promote excellence in Food Hygiene and Food Safety Management in catering establishments across Scotland and Northern Ireland) and it's important that a distinction is made.

d) Local authority websites

The concept of providing the information via a website was seen as worthwhile and valuable (for consumers), although some were seen as better than others (websites that allow the viewer to compare businesses on the same page were seen as best).

The local authority websites were in various stages of set-up i.e. some up and running, others not.

There was a feeling that standardised websites/information would add credence to the scheme and that it would be good to iron out inconsistencies where possible.



e) Suggested improvements by the local authorities

Like businesses, local authorities were asked to say what improvements they would like to see made to the scheme and the implementation of the scheme. The following suggestions were made:

▶▶ More time

- ▶ In advance to understand the system and what it will entail
- ▶ Longer run-in period would have helped: sufficient to allow databases to be merged and paperwork to be completed
- ▶ More time to check database and scoring

“I got a bit bogged down in paper work ...it was all a push in the end”

▶▶ Raise awareness / knowledge

- ▶ Publicity / advertising could be more visible (TV + Press + PR)
- ▶ The businesses need to understand its importance and relevance to them, so this needs to be publicised effectively
- ▶ General public – need to understand what it all means (although hopefully this will increase gradually anyway from word of mouth)

▶▶ Food Standards Agency Scotland Resource

- ▶ Make sure Food Standards Agency Scotland is available for advice if rolled out (already happening in the pilot areas)
- ▶ Although perhaps Food Standards Agency Scotland could take on the website element i.e. design the template and offer technical help (and possibly provide more in-depth data/recommendations/templates on the Food Standards Agency Scotland website).