

Nutrition: Northern Ireland (NI)

In Northern Ireland, we are responsible for the delivery of some nutrition and dietary health policy.

The aim is to improve nutrition and health outcomes by making healthier food products available and increasing consumers' understanding of nutrition, allowing the healthy choice to be the easy choice. Our Dietary Health team lead and develop dietary health policy through working collaboratively with other government departments, district councils, academia, community groups, the food industry, and others.

Objectives for 2021/22

- take forward key objectives of dietary health and nutrition policy in NI (within [draft Programme for Government, A Fitter Future for All, Making Life Better](#)) in partnership with NI government departments, the NI food industry and other stakeholders.
- deliver actions within the Eating Well Choosing Better (EWCB) programme by working with the retail, manufacturing and out of home sectors to achieve industry targets for [sugar, salt](#), and calories set by UK government.
- improve insight and understanding through surveillance of the NI population's nutrient intake, food consumption, purchasing, knowledge, behaviours, and attitudes in relation to healthy eating and communicating this widely to stakeholders.

Progress against objectives

The FSA in NI, Public Health Agency (NI) and [safefood](#), in partnership with Health and Social Care (HSC) colleagues, jointly produced [Nutritional Standards](#) to ensure the provision of healthier food choices for staff and visitors in HSC settings. Revised standards were published in March 2022.

The FSA in NI worked with local food manufacturers, retailers, and the out of home sector on the 4-5-year Eating Well Choosing Better (EWCB) programme. We support small and medium sized enterprises with reformulation and reducing portion sizes to make healthy choices easier. We align our action and delivery plan with UK governments targets.

During 2021, our face-to-face engagement with businesses was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Dietary Health team connected with businesses by hosting a reformulation webinar for the bakery sector. 55 delegates from the manufacturing, retail, catering, and education sectors in NI were in attendance. The objective of the webinar was to motivate the bakery sector in NI to think positively about reformulation and communicate the wide range of support available. Post-webinar, all delegates were sent information on reformulation and [a link to the recorded webinar](#) which has been viewed 1,142 times since posted online.

Within the out of home sector, the [Calorie Wise scheme](#) continues to be delivered in partnership with the eleven district councils. The scheme encourages food businesses to voluntarily calorie label food and drink items on their menus, supported by the FSA's free online calorie calculator and allergen management tool, [MenuCal](#). Due to COVID-19, promotion of the scheme has been limited over the past two years.

Despite this since March 2021 to March 2022, there has been:

- a 63% increase in recipes inputted into MenuCal among all users (figure 23)
- 181% increase in recipes placed on MenuCal

There has been a noticeable increase in user numbers and recipes inputted since March 2022. This appears to be driven by new users from England seeking to comply with new mandatory calorie labelling laws which came into effect in England in April 2022. Since April 2021, 1,004 'allergen only' recipes have been inputted into the tool. The number of these recipes increased considerably prior to the implementation of Natasha's law in October 2021.

Figure 23: Number of recipes inputted into MenuCal March 2021 to 2022

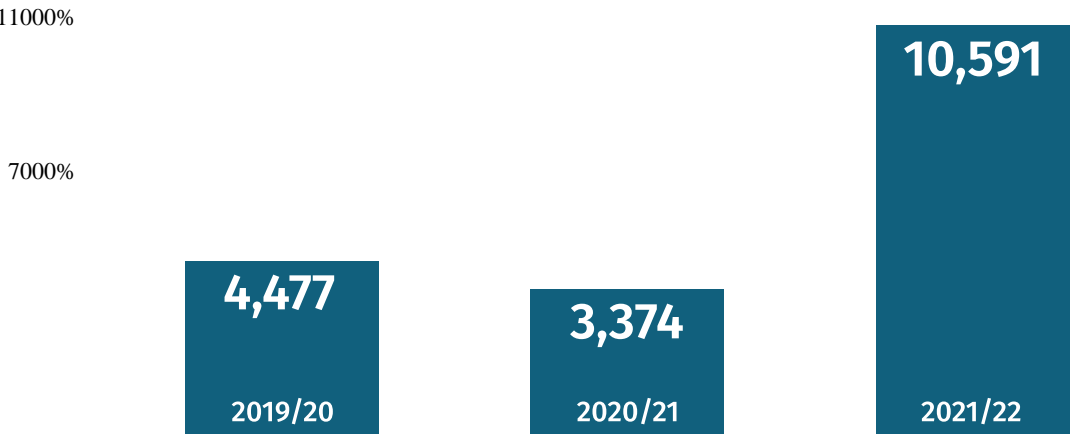
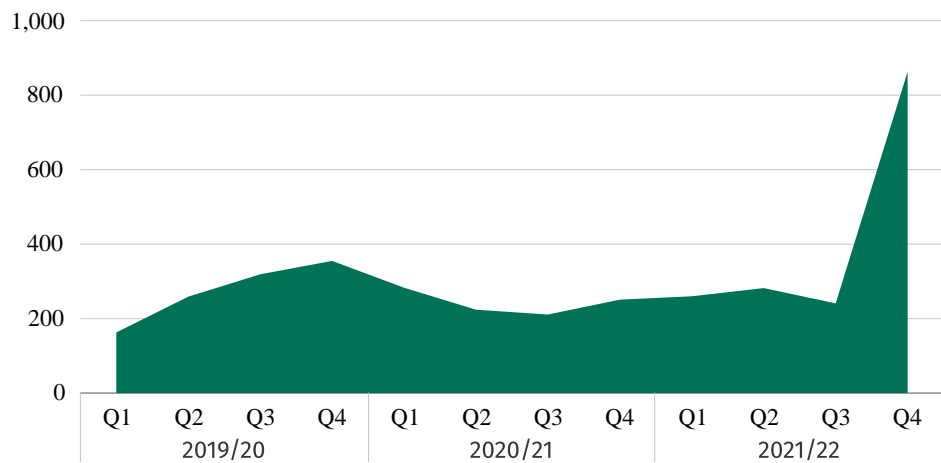


Figure 24: Number of logins to MenuCal March 2021 to 2022



The Dietary Health team continue to monitor NI consumers' understanding and knowledge of recommended daily calorie intake, use of traffic light labels, attitudes towards reformulation and calorie information, and awareness of campaign communications through the FSA's EWCB Tracker Survey. Data collection for the seventh wave of the survey was completed in October 2021, and a [report](#) of the findings was published in March 2022.

Key Findings for 2021 (Wave 7) include:

- 87% of respondents in 2021 recognise the traffic light label which has remained high and consistent throughout each wave
- 42% of respondents in 2021 use the traffic light label, a 14% point decrease from 2020 (Wave 6)

- 79% of respondents in 2021 understand the traffic light label, an increase of 12% points from 2019 (Wave 5). Data from wave 6 is not available.

In developing our dietary health policy, we ensure that our work is based on robust evidence. During 2021, we worked with Kantar Fast Moving Consumer Goods to monitor take home food and drink purchasing in NI from 2016, 2019 and 2020. This data has been collated into a [report](#) examining key trends and identifying food and drink categories that are of concern to dietary health. The report has been shared with stakeholders and has had 110 page views since publication in December 2021 to February 2022.

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