

National Food Crime Unit (NFCU)

The National Food Crime Unit is a law enforcement function of the Food Standards Agency.

The NFCU is a dedicated law enforcement function of the FSA tasked with protecting consumers and industry from food crime.

The work of the NFCU plays a critical part in the FSA's objective to ensure that consumers can trust that food is what it says it is. It does this by detecting, investigating and disrupting serious fraud and criminality within food supply chains. The NFCU uses UK law enforcement's established '4P approach' to plan and deliver operational outcomes across its end-to-end counter-fraud capability. These are to:

- **Prepare:** ensure the necessary capabilities exist to tackle food crime
- **Protect:** reduce the vulnerability of businesses and consumers to food crime threats and risks
- **Pursue:** prosecute offenders and confiscate the proceeds of food crime
- **Prevent:** stop individuals/businesses from committing food crime

Objectives for 2021/22

- planning and delivering 4P responses in line with our Control Strategy Priorities and including a greater focus on proactivity
- continued progression towards securing additional investigative powers for the NFCU, to allow it to operate with increased autonomy and maximum effectiveness
- developing our people and capabilities

Progress made during 2021/22

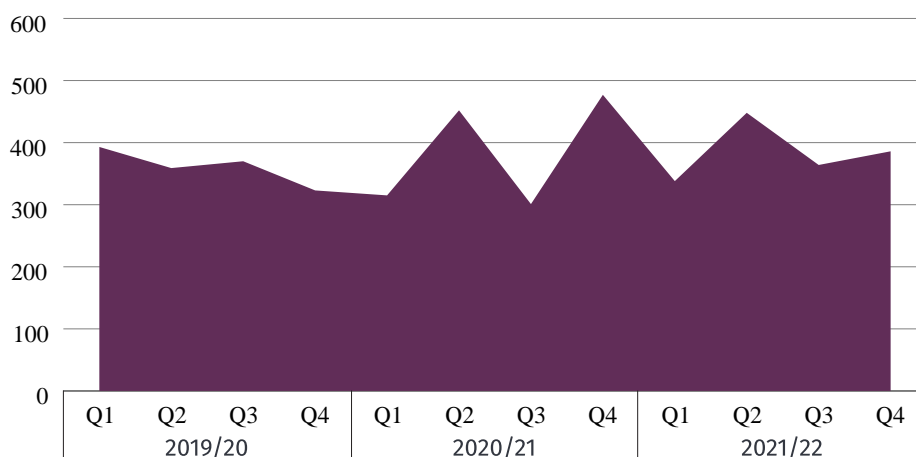
- outcomes have been delivered across the spectrum of the 4P response, including encouraging 242 businesses to use the NFCU Food Fraud Resilience self-assessment tool with 40% of those businesses following up with the NFCU for further detail.
- the FSA achieved tangible progress with officials and ministers across government around the need for the Unit to secure additional investigative powers, including the proposed agreement of primary legislation concerning this. The absence of these capabilities remains a barrier to the unit operating with maximum effectiveness. the NFCU ensured all investigators hold relevant experience or new accreditation and launched the Intelligence Professionalisation Programme for eligible staff. The FSA maintained, increased sensitive intelligence capabilities, and ensured the FSA was included on the Covert Human Intelligence (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021.

More information can be found below.

Intelligence

Volumes of intelligence recorded have remained relatively stable. There are some minor quarterly fluctuations in the number of intelligence reports received which may be associated with many factors including seasonal activity, the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and NFCU proactivity (Figure 21 as below).

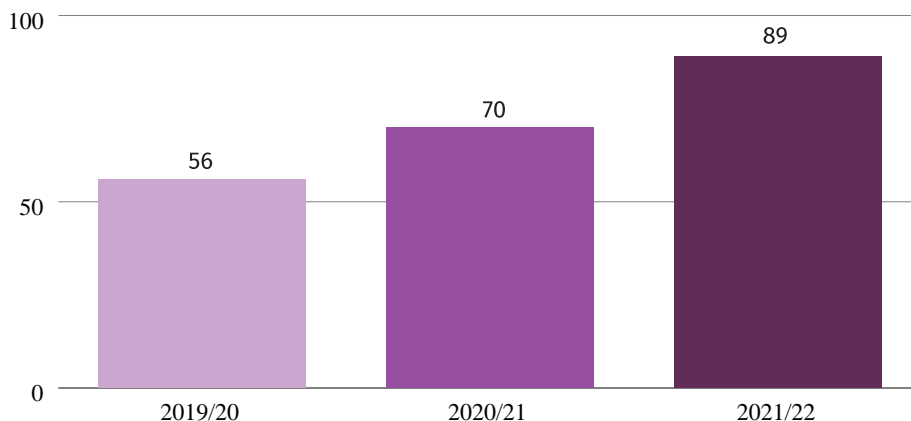
Figure 21: Intelligence received each quarter



Investigations and operations

The NFCU (as lead or supporting agency) opened 89 new strands of operational activity in 2021/22 compared to 70 in 2020/2021. This represents a 27% increase compared to 2020/21.

Figure 22: New operational activity by financial year



[The NFCU Control Strategy](#) outlines the Unit's current priorities, as well as the actions we have planned to prevent food crime, deter and disrupt food criminals and bring offenders to justice.

Operational activity shows 78% alignment with NFCU Control Strategy Priorities. This operational focus demonstrates that NFCU resources are engaged in addressing and tackling issues the NFCU has identified, through its intelligence assessments, as key food crime risks. The Unit's 21/22 business plan set a target of 70% alignment.

FSA's first conviction following an NFCU-led investigation:

A milestone achievement by the NFCU in 2021/22 was the first conviction following an investigation led by the Unit. The conviction related to the sale of 2,4- Dinitrophenol (DNP) for human consumption and alongside other offences resulted in a 28-month prison sentence.

Two investigations supported by the NFCU also led to convictions relating to offences under the Food Safety Act 1990. The Unit continues to progress three investigations towards case file submission to CPS in 2022/23.

Financial recovery:

In 2021/22 the NFCU Financial Investigations team made significant progress in recovering the assets obtained through food crime. They successfully secured both a confiscation order for £11,037.51 made through offending and an Asset Restraining Order preventing dissipation of assets prior to a Confiscation Order.

Operational Outcomes

Where NFCU action has had a positive impact in reducing threat, risk and/or harm by food crime, (for example where we have made a prosecution or arrest, through to direct engagement with a business to increase their resilience to food crime), the action is recorded as one of two types of operational outcomes, 'disruptions' and 'NFCU outcomes'. Both capture the work of the NFCU, but disruptions meet a higher benchmark in terms of confirmed impact. We report these to the National Crime Agency.

During 2021/22 there were:

- 64 disruptions
- 79 NFCU outcomes
- of which the NFCU led 59 and supported or coordinated 84

Disruptions achieved by NFCU this financial year have included:

- the indefinite suspension of a person's approval to handle Animal- By-Products (ABP) following the identification of ABP being diverted back into the human food chain. This disrupted the activity of a multi-million-pound business.
- the takedown of 28 websites or marketplace listings which were selling DNP for human consumption.
- NFCU enquiries helped to locate and secure the arrest of a suspect and ensured the issuing of bail conditions which impeded the suspect's ability to continue offending within the food industry.
- the NFCU, alongside our Imports team, supported Border Force in the development of an operation which took place at an airport in January leading to the seizure of 525.77 kg of illegal imports of Product of Animal Origin (POAO).

FSA priority programmes

These areas of work were the FSA's priority areas of delivery for 2021/22.

- Achieving business compliance
- Operational Transformation
- Food Hypersensitivity

Back to the [Main report: Activities and Performances 2021/22](#).